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**THE UPRISING IN THE ‘PERIPHERY’:
BENGAL 1857-58**

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School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PhD)**

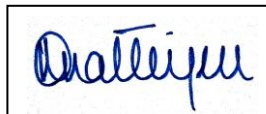
**SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES (SOAS)
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**

2015

DECLARATION FOR PHD THESIS

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Date: 15 January 2015

ABSTRACT

The thesis deals with the rebellion of 1857 – variously described as the Sepoy Mutiny or the First Indian War of Independence – in an area generally stereotyped as the periphery in the context of the rebellion. The geographical area covered in the thesis includes the lower province of the Bengal Presidency, which at present roughly incorporates the states of West Bengal and Assam in India, and Bangladesh. Using the hitherto underutilized sources this dissertation seeks to venture into the task of constructing a narrative of sequential events related to the rebellion in this region, while simultaneously analysing the moments of crises that the colonial administration had encountered during this time. The dissertation argues that in spite of the regional specificities that determined the nature, character and outcome of the movement, the rebellion was a multifaceted and multi-layered one, and the events of varying multitudes in the region were interconnected with the broader conflagration of 1857, together which brought about a crisis of the colonial rule in Indian subcontinent. While doing so, the thesis looks at the action of the rebels, the networks of communication, and the role and significance of non-traditional modes of communication, with specific focus on the circulation of rumours and panic in shaping the character of the rebellion in the region. It argues that during a moment of social and political upheaval, such as the rebellion of 1857, rumours and their consequent effect have the potential to be a source of historical analysis. As a corollary to the present study, the thesis also revisits the question of ‘loyalism’ of the middle class intelligentsia of Bengal during the rebellion, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of such terminologies.

DEDICATION

In the Memory of My Father
Late Professor Basudeb Chattopadhyay

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Pursuing a Ph.D. project has been a both painful and enjoyable experience. It's just like climbing a high peak, step by step, accompanied with bitterness, hardships, frustration, encouragement and trust and with so many people's kind help. While finally managing to pull myself at the top, I have realised that it was, in fact, teamwork that got me there. Though it will not be enough to express my gratitude in words to all those people who helped me, I would still like to give my heartfelt thanks to all of them.

At the very outset, I would like to take the opportunity to thank my supervisor, Dr. Shabnum Tejani, who had accepted me as her PhD student without any hesitation and guided me right from the very inception. It is indeed difficult to express in words how much I owe her for the continuous support, guidance and encouragement. She has been a friend, tutor and a great mentor to me.

This project has been, in a way, the brainchild of my father, late Professor Dr. Basudeb Chattopadhyay. I do not know how to thank him. It was he who had first introduced me to the fascinating world of history and had been a pillar of strength and support to me. During his stint as the Director of State Archives in West Bengal, he showed me interesting documents, hitherto untouched, concerning various issues of historical significance. It was from one such document that the whole idea of this project was first conceived. After his untimely demise, it therefore became an imperative for me to carry forward the task he had undertaken. I am not sure if the present project has been anywhere close to what he had perceived, but am glad that I have at least tried my best to fulfil his last academic venture. This thesis is dedicated to him.

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GLOSSARY

All the references, unless otherwise specified, have been consulted from Hobson Jobson's Anglo-Indian Glossary or the Oxford English Dictionary

Assar: The third month of the Hindu calendar.

Bania/Baniya: A trader or merchant belonging to the Indian business class.

Barkandaz: An armed retainer or policeman.

Barua/Baruah: An officer of rank having superintendence over a department.

Bazar/Bazaar: A permanent market or street of shops.

Bhadralok: Bengali gentlemen, generally belonging to the upper caste

Budmash: One following evil courses for the means of livelihood.

Bungalow: The most usual class of house occupied by Europeans in the interior of India; being on one story, and covered by a pyramidal roof, which in the normal bungalow is of thatch, but may be of tiles without impairing its title to be called a bungalow. Most of the houses of officers in Indian cantonments are of this character.

Chapati: Hand-made flattened wheat bread.

Cutchery/Kutchery: An office of administration; Court of Justice.

Dacoit/Dacoity: A robber belonging to an armed gang. The term, being current in Bengal, got into the Penal Code. By law, to constitute dacoity, there must be five or more in the gang committing the crime.

Daroga: Superintendent of Police.

Dewan/Diwan: Chief Minister of a state.

Diwani: Revenue collecting rights.

Doab: Tract of land lying between two confluent rivers.

Fakir/Fakeer: Properly an indigent person, but specially applied to a Mahomedan religious mendicant, also, loosely and inaccurately, to Hindu devotees and naked ascetics.

Firangi/Firingee/Feringhi: In Bengal Proper, this term implied native born/converted Christians and also in general referred to the Europeans of Portuguese origin.

Ghat/Ghaut: A path of descent on the bank of a river.

Ghuddee: Seat/throne.

Gohain: A title usually given to the descendants of the Ahom Kings.

Gora: A native word for white man, usually referred to the European soldiers.

Haat: Weekly local market

Havildar: A sepoy non-commissioned officer, corresponding to a sergeant.

Hazaree: Supervisor

Hindustan/Hindoostan: Originally the region of the river Indus; in the colonial period it denoted upper India (the plain of the Ganges, except Bengal)

Hindustani: Used substantively in two senses (a) a native of Hindustan, and (b) the language of that country.

Jahazi: Sea-men; detachment of a Naval Brigade.

Jemadar/Jamadar/Jemautdar: the word indicates generally, a leader of a body of individuals. Technically, in the Indian army, it is the title of the second rank of native officer in a company of Sepoys, the Subadar/Subedar being the first. In this sense the word dates from the reorganization of the army in 1768.

Jihad: In Islam, it refers to the spiritual struggle within oneself against sin; often used to denote religious war or struggle against the non-believers.

Kafir/Kaffir: Infidel.

Khel: An organisation of *paiks* having to perform specific services to the Ahom government.

Kutbah/Khutbah: Religious sermon delivered to the public according to Islamic tradition.

Lota: The small spheroidal brass pot which Hindus used for drinking, and sometimes for cooking. This is the exclusive Anglo-Indian application, but natives also extend it to spherical pipkins of earthenware.

Mahajan: Money-lender.

Maidan: An open space or park used for meetings, sports and other activities.

Mofussil: The country stations and districts, as contra-distinguished from the Presidency; or, relatively, the rural localities of a district as contra-distinguished from the Sudder or chief station, which is the residence of the district authorities.

Mohur: Coins made up of valuable metals, mainly gold.

Muktear: An Agent or a spokesman.

Naik: Native non-commissioned officer, equivalent to corporal

Najib/Nujeeb: A kind of half-disciplined infantry soldiers under some of the native governments; and also at one time a kind of militia under the British.

Native: a person born in a specified place or associated with a place by birth.

Nawab/Nabob: A native governor of a province during the time of the Mughal Empire and early British colonial rule. From this use it became a title of rank without necessarily having any office attached.

Pagri: Usually referred to the turban or a head band. The term being often used in Anglo-Indian colloquial for a scarf of cotton or silk -wound round the hat in turban-form.

Paik: A footman, an armed attendant, or inferior police and revenue officer, a messenger, a couiier, a village watchman.

Peshwa: A leader, a guide. The word refers to the Chief Minister of the Maratha power.

Pultun: Native translation of the word Platoon. It is the usual native word for a regiment or battalion.

Purbia/Purbiya: Inhabitant of the north Indian region that included Oudh, Bihar and Benares.

Risaladar: A native officer commanding a troop of irregular horse.

Russud/Rasad: The provision of grain, forage, and other necessities got ready by the local officers at the camping ground of a, military force or official cortege.

Sadar: Literal meaning is Chief or Head, used as a prefix for denoting words like Head Quarters, Chief Station or Chief Court (Sadar-Station, Sadar-Adawlat).

Sahib: The title by which, all over India, European gentlemen, and it may be said Europeans generally, are addressed, and spoken of, when no disrespect is intended, by natives. It is also the general title (at least where Hindustani or Persian is used) which is affixed to the name or office of a European.

Sahukar: Moneylender.

Sarkar: Government; regime.

Sati: A religious funeral practice among some Indian communities in which a recently widowed woman would have immolated herself on her husband's funeral pyre.

Sepoy/Sepoys: In Anglo-Indian use, a native soldier disciplined and dressed in European style.

Seristadar: A keeper of records.

Taluk/Talook: Holder of a 'Taluk'; In Bengal Presidency it is applied to tracts of proprietary, sometimes not easily distinguished from zamindaries, and sometimes subordinate to, or dependent on zamindars.

Talukdar/Talookdar: A person in charge of a Taluk.

Thagis/Thugs/Thuggees: In the colonial period the term applied to a robber or assassin of a peculiar class, who sallying forth in gang and in the character of wayfarers, either on business or pilgrimage, fall in with other travellers on road, and having gained their confidence, take a favourable opportunity of strangling them by throwing their turbans or handkerchiefs round their necks and then plundering them and burying their bodies.

Thana/Thannah: A police station.

Zamindar/Zemindar: Literally refers to a land-holder. One holding land on which he pays revenue to the government directly, and not to any intermediate superior. In Bengal Proper the zamindars hold generally considerable tracts, on a permanent settlement of the amount to be paid to government. In the N. W. Provinces there are often a great many zamindars in a village, holding by a common settlement, periodically renewable.

ABBREVIATIONS

BLOC: British Library Online Collections

N.I.: Native Infantry

GOGG: General Order of the Governor General

GOB: Government of Bengal

HCPP: House of Commons Parliamentary Papers

IOR: India Office Records

MSS EUR: European Manuscripts Collection (Private Papers)

NAB: National Archives of Bangladesh

NAI: National Archives of India

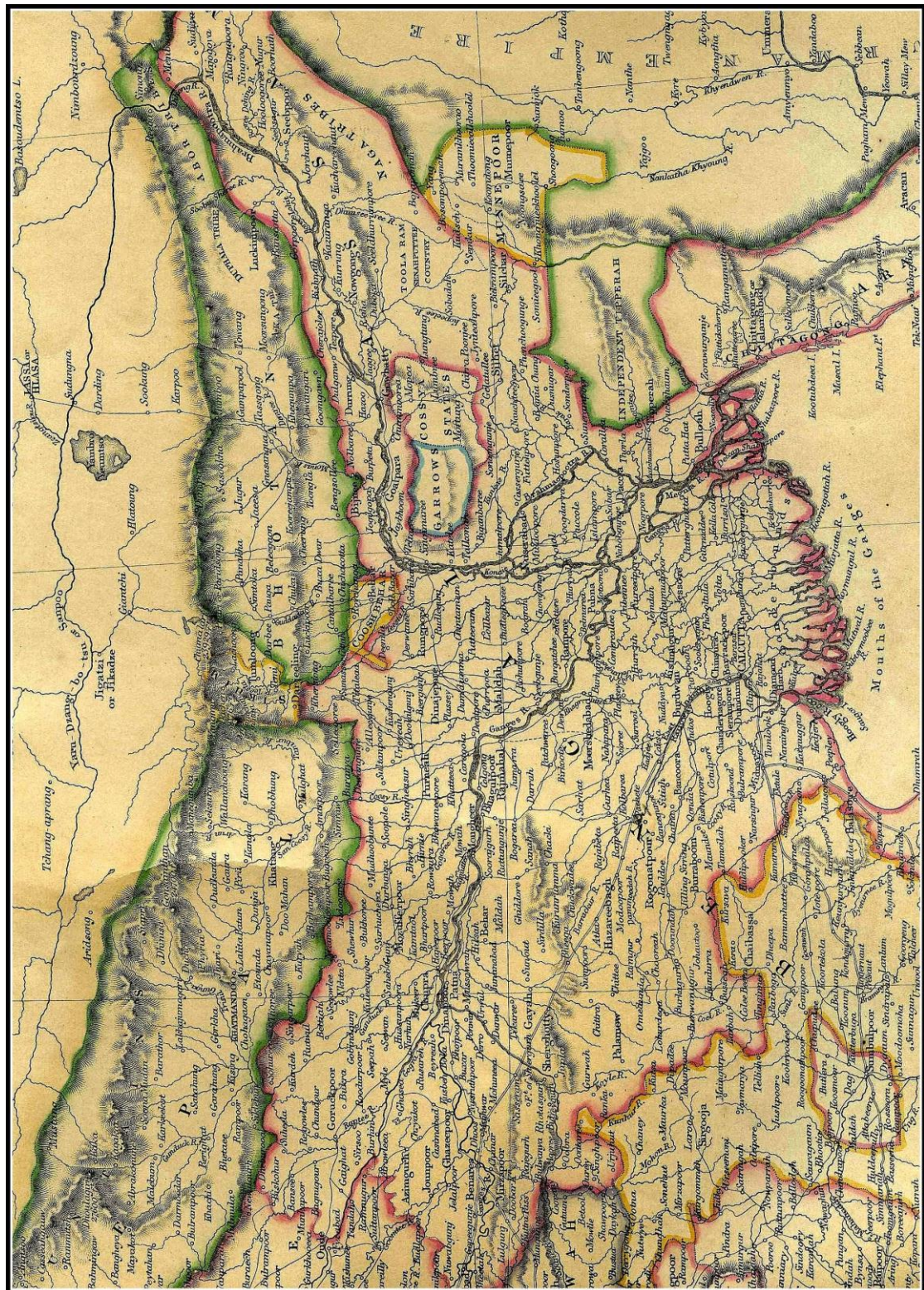
OIOC: Oriental and India Office Collections

WBSA: West Bengal State Archives

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In the course of the thesis the term ‘Uprising’ or ‘Rebellion’ has been chosen alternatively, unless quoted otherwise, in order to avoid the somewhat cliché debate of whether it was the ‘First War of Indian Independence’ or a mere ‘Sepoy War’. Also, the term ‘native’ has been used in a purely descriptive manner while referring to Indians. I have used the contemporary spellings of the places mentioned in the thesis, unless quoted otherwise.

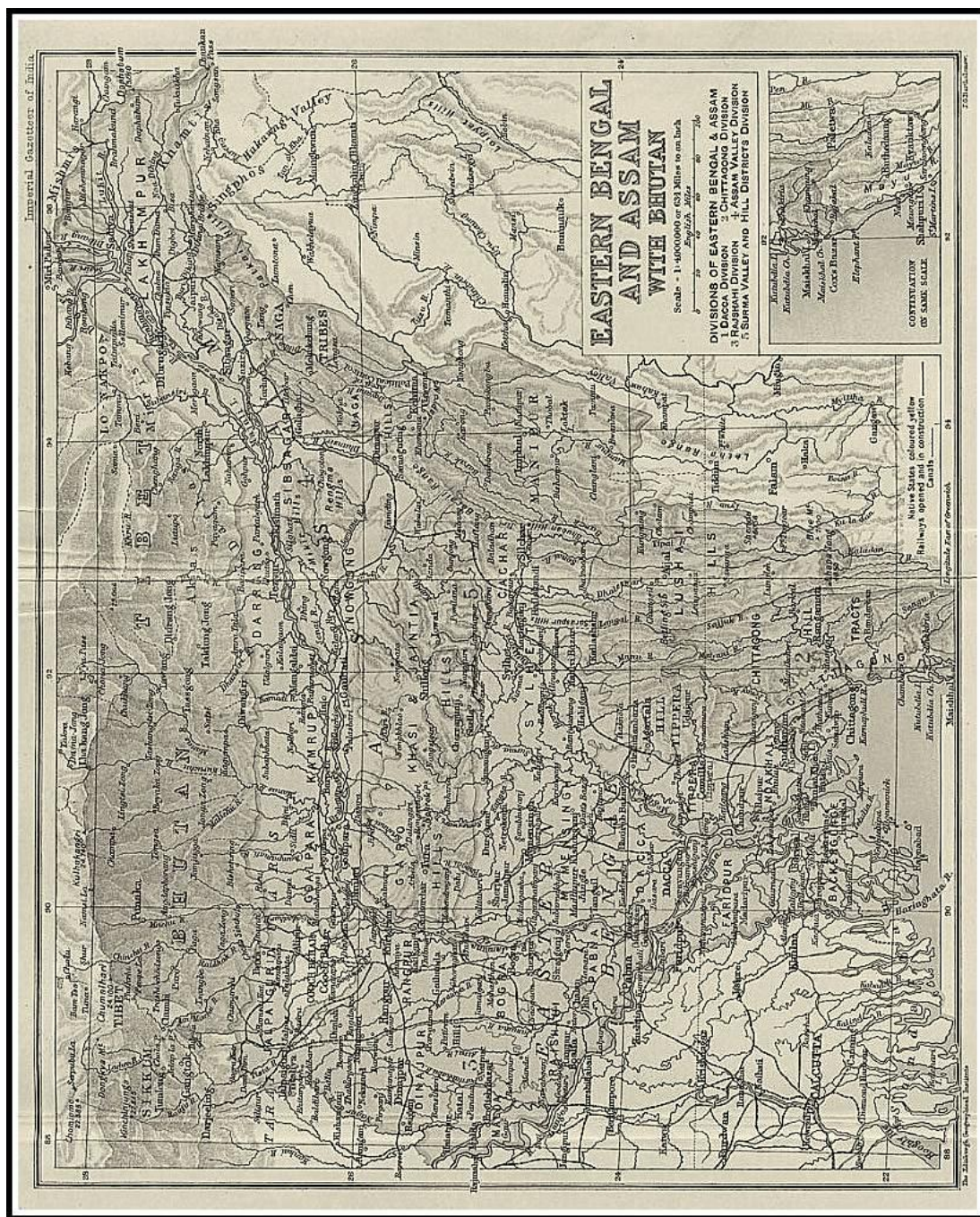
Map One: The Bengal Presidency



Map Two: The Lower Province of Bengal



Map Three: Eastern Bengal and Assam



INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about the socio-political and intellectual history of the rebellion of 1857 in an area which has for long been considered peripheral in the context of the uprising. Taking the case study of the lower province of the Bengal Presidency and the north-east frontier of Assam, the dissertation draws out local responses in the region, proceeding to show their significance for our understanding of the nature of the uprising and its implications. It is an attempt to study some of the moments of crises that the colonial government had to encounter in the region. While doing so the thesis extends the geographical parameter of the uprising, the study of which has hitherto remained confined mostly to the north central Gangetic area, beyond the north-central Gangetic heartland, transcending the regional/national boundaries stressing that the notion of a 'centre' and a 'periphery' is not appropriate since most events, with all their regional specificities, ran into each other to create a larger phenomenon.

The dissertation shows that unlike the events unfolding in the Gangetic heartland, where rebel action and the counter-insurgency of the colonial state were starkly visible, the region covered in the study presents a sequence of chronological events that has been hitherto understated but which requires to be integrated into the account of the rebellion as a whole since they flowed into it. The links and connections here indicate important aspects of the crisis of the colonial state at the time of the uprising. In the process of doing so this dissertation evaluates the role and significance of non-traditional modes of communication, with specific focus on the

circulation of rumours in and around the region and the response of the colonial government towards them.

In presenting such a picture, the dissertation analyses the cumulative effects of events in the north-central Gangetic heartland and the resultant effect of those events in the region under study, showing how specificities of an area might determine the nature and character of events (as in the case of Assam, for instance), but that these were far from isolated acts and were connected to the processes that made up the rebellion of 1857. In this way, the dissertation will also show the various modes and networks of communications that the rebels of the region had established with their brethren of the Gangetic heartland.

The other intervention that this dissertation seeks to make is to revisit the question of 'loyalism' amongst the middle class intelligentsia of Bengal during the rebellion of 1857. As C. A. Bayly and Clare Anderson have noted, the distinction between the collaborators and the rebels cannot be explained simply in terms of causative factors, for there were many exceptions to apparent social, economic, cultural or religious connections.¹ To Anderson this is what makes the question of loyalty and rebellion perplexing.² This dissertation shares this concern and argues with the help of contemporary reports and reactions that the uprising of 1857 had more subtle and nuanced reflections. The patterns and trajectories of response from the actors involved went beyond simplistic categorisations. In Bengal, 'loyalism' of the intelligentsia contained internal dilemmas and contradictions, thus opening a

¹ C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, The New Cambridge History of India, II, 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 170.

² Clare Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857-8: Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion*, Anthem South Asian Studies, London; New York: Anthem Press, 2007, p. 11.

space for moving beyond terminologies of ‘loyalist’ or ‘rebel’. Opposition towards the Company rule in Bengal were articulated in a rhetoric that was different from those of the ‘rebel’ leaders of 1857. The forms were different, but it was connected by a common feeling of discontent and dissent.

In the introduction, I have firstly outlined the major trends in the literature on 1857, in order to situate this dissertation within the larger framework of the historiography and also to show the point of departure. Secondly, I show the nature of recent studies that have dealt with similar themes. Thirdly, I discuss the more important aspects of the methodology that I have followed and the chapterisation of the thesis.

THE LITERATURE – GENERAL TRENDS

It has been said that ‘no military revolt in the world has produced so much literature as the uprising of 1857 in India, commonly known as the Sepoy Mutiny.’³ In the last one hundred and fifty years almost every aspect of this history has been discussed, contested, re-imagined, re-invented, appropriated and memorialised over time and across the social spectrum.⁴ Innumerable memoirs, journals, reminiscences, narratives, and histories followed the uprising, almost immediately. The contemporary newspapers, both in India as well as in England, had their columns filled with the news and stories relating to the event that shook the foundation of the

³ Sashi Bhusan Chaudhuri, *English Historical Writings on the Indian Mutiny, 1857-1859*, Calcutta: World Press, 1979, p. 7.

⁴ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, “Eighteen-Fifty-Seven and Its Many Histories”, in Biswamoy Pati (ed.), *1857: Essays from Economic and Political Weekly*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2008: 1-22, p. 1.

colonial power in the Indian subcontinent. Asa Briggs has suggested that ‘no single event more powerfully affected the mind of that generation than the “Indian Mutiny” of 1857.’⁵

Among historians writing in the aftermath of the uprising, a tremendous reaction moved all who were interested in the preservation of the legitimacy of the British Empire. Initially, it was the self appointed task of the British historians to relieve the Empire from the psychological shock of the mutiny. Therefore a British historiography on the ‘Indian Mutiny’ developed which showed some definite trends of interpretations. Charles Ball published a two-volume account of the happenings in 1858-59 and a spate of writings followed almost immediately.⁶ The most important of these was the magnum opus written by Sir John William Kaye, most certainly ‘the chief historian of the Mutiny’, as Eric Stokes called him.⁷ Others like Colonel G.B. Malleson set the trend with his ‘conspiracy theory’ and explained the entire outburst as an outcome of the premeditated designs of a handful of leaders, the so-called ‘conspirators’.⁸ Even an otherwise liberal writer like Charles Dickens did not hesitate to give call for a retaliatory race war.⁹ The rebellion of 1857 was thus placed within

⁵ Asa Briggs, *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes, 1851-67*, Rev. and illustrated ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975, p. 5.

⁶ Charles Esq Ball, *The History of the Indian Mutiny: Giving a Detailed Account of the Sepoy Insurrection in India; and a Concise History of the Great Military Events Which Have Tended to Consolidate British Empire in Hindostan*, 2 vols., London; New York: London Printing & Publishing Co., 1858.

⁷ Sir John William Kaye, *A History of the Great Revolt*, Reprint ed., 3 vols., New Delhi: Gyan Pub. House, 2008.

⁸ G. B. Malleson, *The Indian Mutiny of 1857*, London: Seeley, 1891.

⁹ For further details see: Grace Moore, *Dickens and Empire: Discourses of Class, Race and Colonialism in the Works of Charles Dickens*, London: Ashgate, 2004. When the rebellion was at its peak, Charles Dickens in a letter to Emile de la Rue on 23 October 1857 wrote in a hysterical

the British imperial history of India. By means of a deliberate process of selection and elimination, the unity of the narrative and its central consistency – the crisis of British rule in India and the process of overcoming of that crisis – was ensured by these early historians. The uprising of 1857 tended to appear as an interlude in the process of transition from the rule of the Company to the rule of the Crown. The significant importance they attached to the British counter-insurgency across the country in comparison to the account of the rebels, quite evidently reflected their objective.

By the end of the nineteenth century the uprising attracted and inspired the first generation of Indian nationalists. Almost like a straightforward act of inversion, the rebels who were scoundrels to the imperialists became icons to the nationalists. ‘The Volcano or The First War of Indian Independence’ by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar may be cited as the perfect illustration of how the colonialist narrative structure was appropriated by Indians and reproduced with the help of a different rhetoric.¹⁰ His pro-nationalist stances made Savarkar look with contempt and reject the British assertion that attributed the ‘war’ to the issue of greased cartridges only. Savarkar connected the rebellion with British atrocities and argued that the people rose up in arms against the British for safeguarding their *swadharma* (own religion) and

manner: ‘I wish I were Commander-in-Chief over there! I would address that Oriental character which must be powerfully spoken to, in something like the following placard, which should be vigorously translated into all native dialects. I, The Inimitable, holding this office of mine, and firmly believing that I hold it by the permission of Heaven and not by the appointment of Satan, have the honour to inform you Hindoo gentry that it is my intention, with all possible avoidance of unnecessary cruelty and with all merciful swiftness of execution, to exterminate the Race from the face of the earth, which disfigured the earth with the late abominable atrocities.’ *ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁰ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*, Bombay: Sethani Company, 1909.

swarajya (homeland). In the process, Malleson's 'conspirators' were turned into 'heroes' and the underlying unity of the empire was replaced by the unity of the nation.

The access to official records and archival sources in the post-independence era revealed many interesting developments related to the debates on the nature of the uprising of 1857. There seemed to be a more objective, nevertheless nationalist, assessment of the uprising. Most notable amongst these were the writings of Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Surendranath Sen, Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya and Sashi Bhusan Chaudhury.¹¹ These historians attempted to write a total history of the entire rebellion within the parameters of a single work, constructing an overarching unity that would cover up all the fissures, incongruities and incompatible moments of popular action. But in retrospect it seems quite obvious that in its manifest form, the uprising failed to match up to the nationalist historian's notion of an anti-colonial struggle. In a way this is paradoxical because they themselves had foreclosed many alternative avenues of enquiry, ignored the multiple layers of the uprising and had instead imposed on many ambiguous episodes a fixed meaning of their own. In the uprising of 1857, the rebellion of the sepoys in the towns of Gangetic heartland of northern India seemed to be the only layer that fell into this structured pattern, probably because this was where the rebels could be seen as at least attempting to construct an alternative state power.

¹¹ Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, 1st ed., Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957; Surendra Nath Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, New Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1957; Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, *The Sepoy Mutiny 1857: A Social Study and Analysis*, 1st ed., Calcutta: Bookland, 1957; Sashi Bhusan Chaudhuri, *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies, 1857-1859*, Calcutta: World Press, 1957.

The nationalist interpretation of the rebellion of 1857 was not accepted by the majority of the professional historians of the time. By 1960, as Thomas Metcalf has argued, there was a greater consensus among historians that it was 'something more than a sepoy mutiny, but something less than a national revolt.'¹² However, it was Eric Stokes who for the first time tried to look beyond this conventional interpretation of the nature of uprising of 1857.¹³ Dealing with the popular dimension of this uprising in the rural areas of the upper and central doab, he went on to argue that the uprising was not one movement, be it a peasant revolt, a mutiny of sepoys or a war of national independence, it was many.¹⁴ The nature and scope of the movement varied vastly from one district to another and even between villages of the districts and was determined by a set of complex factors including ecology, culture, tenurial forms and the variable impact of the colonial state. Stokes stressed the role of the new magnates because it was they who were able to protect the British interests in the districts when the sepoys had mutinied and the police disintegrated. Where no such magnate elements existed, groups of rebellious villages almost always tried to create an over-arching structure of authority. On the other hand in

¹² Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt, India, 1857-1870*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 60.

¹³ Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. Also see: Eric Stokes and C. A. Bayly, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

¹⁴ Doab: Tract of land lying between two confluent rivers. The Doab, unqualified by the names of any rivers, designates the flat alluvial tract between the Ganges and Yamuna rivers in western and south-western Uttar Pradesh state in India, extending from the Shiwalik range to the two rivers' confluence at Allahabad. Henry Sir Yule, A. C. Burnell, and William Crooke, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical, and Discursive*, London: John Murray, 1903, p. 247.

places like Awadh the pressure of village opinion drove otherwise cautious magnates into the rebellion.

This was the central theme of the argument of Rudrangshu Mukherjee.¹⁵ Evaluating the popular content of the uprising of 1857 in Awadh he explored the interaction between the material environment affected by colonial policy and the events of the revolt. Mukherjee quite convincingly has argued in his work that the rebellion in Awadh 'pertained to the people as a whole and was carried on by the people' and the choice of the word 'popular' was thus deliberate.¹⁶ The central arguments of Rudrangshu Mukherjee were first that the popular content of the revolt was characterized by the protest of the talukdars and peasants fighting together against the colonial state, second that they fought together and not against each other because of their shared traditions of commonality and mutual dependence, third the British revenue policy tended to disrupt the erstwhile existence of talukdars and peasants and their world of mutuality and interdependence, fourth the soldiers, themselves the product of the same agrarian world, shared much of the grievances of the talukdars and peasants, and finally, that it was eventually the mutiny of the soldiers that precipitated the moment when the wide-spread rural disaffection was transformed into active civil rebellion. Mukherjee's description and analysis of the Mutiny is one of the best accounts on the subject written so far. Placing the mutiny in Lucknow in the wider perspective of an all-India movement, he traced the connection between uprisings as they spread from one station to another. Drawing a parallel with

¹⁵ Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt, 1857-1858: A Study of Popular Resistance*, Delhi; London: Oxford University Press, 1984.

¹⁶ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. vii.

the 'Great Fear' during the French Revolution, he convincingly touched upon the way rumours 'often acted as a springboard for sepoy action'.¹⁷

The interpretation put forward by Stokes and Mukherjee was taken to an altogether new height by the scholarly intervention of Ranajit Guha. All the great issues of interpretation of 1857, as Stokes had argued, turned on the assessment of peasant action, since the peasantry formed the crucial link between the military mutiny and the civil uprising. However, as mentioned before, to Stokes, this assignation of a central role to the peasants was not matched by any gestures towards making peasants the masters of their own destiny. It was precisely in this regard that Guha intervened with his seminal work, *Elementary Aspects of the Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, and came up with an entirely novel approach about the role of the peasants in revolt.¹⁸ Guha located the peasantry in colonial India within a relationship of power – a relation of dominance and subordination – which derived its material sustenance from the pre-capitalist conditions of production and its legitimacy from a traditional culture still paramount in the superstructure.¹⁹ He rejected the earlier understanding of the peasant mobilisation and the notion that the peasant actions were 'spontaneous' and were launched in a fit of 'absent-mindedness'. In fact Guha's main objective was not to depict the struggle of peasants as a series of specific encounters but in its general form.²⁰ He sought to identify some of these 'general forms' in rebel consciousness – 'elementary aspects' as he preferred

¹⁷ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 73.

¹⁸ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

¹⁹ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*: p. 6.

²⁰ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*: p. 11.

to called them – and classified these as negation, ambiguity, modality, solidarity, transmission and territoriality.

In order to illustrate these categories, Guha drew upon an enormous amount of historical material, which inevitably included the events of the rebellion of 1857. As Guha noted, the peasants could form their own identity through an act of ‘negation’ of their superiors and, therefore, knew exactly what they were doing when they rose in rebellion. This was the common pattern that was found almost everywhere during the uprising of 1857, whereby the rebels had selectively destroyed and plundered the properties of the Europeans and also the symbols that were associated with the ‘dominators’. In this way the prisons, record rooms, factories, telegraphic posts and offices, amongst others, became the objects of attack. This was followed by the act of ‘inversion’ whereby the peasants asserted their resistance by appropriating for themselves the signs of authority that belonged to the dominator.²¹ Guha also analysed the ambiguity of the rulers who were unable to distinguish between a ‘rebellion’ and ‘dacoity’ and classified all the ‘rebels’ as ‘dacoits’.²² But what the colonial administration failed to grasp was that unlike the ‘crime’, a ‘rebellion’ was by nature an open and public event, whereby the affirmation of the intent of the rebels was explicitly manifested.²³ In Kanpur for instance, the rebels met before the uprising to discuss the proceedings, and General Wheeler in the entrenchment was

²¹ Rudrangshu Mukherjee has elaborately described this aspect in one of his later books, whereby he has shown how the British women were subjected to utter humiliation when taken as prisoners after the massacre at Satichaura Ghat in Kanpur and were made to grind corn. See: Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Spectre of Violence: The 1857 Kanpur Massacres*, New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998.

²² Guha, *Elementary Aspects*: p. 101.

²³ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*: p. 111.

actually informed that the attack was about to begin.²⁴ Likewise, as we shall see in chapters 2, 3, and 4, animated conversations between the sepoys of the cantonments took place in Barrackpore, Dhaka, Chittagong and also in Assam regarding the plan of action to be taken during the uprising. The other factor that differentiated the rebellion from a crime was 'destruction'. Guha classified four different forms of destruction: wrecking, burning, eating and looting.²⁵ In the course of the rebellion however these four categories of destruction often lose their separate identities and function as 'mutually connected elements of one single complex'.²⁶ As Mukherjee had pointed out and as has been illustrated in the course of this thesis, there were multiple instances where it was reported that the rebels used fire arrows in order to burn down the bungalows of the European residents and destroyed the telegraph offices in Raniganj, Barrackpore, Chittagong and other places.

The other interesting feature noticeable during the rebellion was the remarkable similarity that was noticed on the part of the rebel actions. Popular resistance inspired by a common faith was a feature of the anti-British mobilisation during the conflagration. And it was not just religion alone, according to Guha, which brought the people together, for there were many instances whereby this solidarity was expressed transcending the religious barriers.²⁷ This expression of solidarity derived its strength from the speed with which the messages of rebellion were transmitted and left the colonial administration completely clueless. C.A. Bayly has convincingly argued that just as the colonial rule had established a network of intelligence and

²⁴ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: pp. 50-51.

²⁵ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*: p. 136.

²⁶ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*: p. 157.

²⁷ See Guha, *Elementary Aspects*: pp. 189-214.

information gathering system for the imperial surveillance, the rebels too had shown a remarkable degree of awareness about the importance of communication during the rebellion.²⁸ During the uprising of 1857 almost everywhere across the northern India, and also the areas covered by this thesis, the rebels had systematically targeted and destroyed most of the formal agencies of communications including the telegraph lines, railway and postal communication and even the Grand Trunk road was under threat. While on the other hand, the rebels had the options of informal modes of communications to fall back on, which included both the verbal and nonverbal means. Guha's analysis of the rebel actions is one of the most significant contributions in understanding the complex nature of the uprising of 1857. Throughout the course of his study Guha emphasised the 'actions' of the rebels than the 'context' of their actions; 'how' the rebels had acted the way they did was more significant to him than 'why' they had acted in such manner. Guha saw them as 'conscious agents' working towards overturning a power structure that they had considered alien, exploitative and oppressive.

This emphasis on the 'actions' of the rebels were taken up by Tapti Roy in her study of Bundelkhand region during the rebellion.²⁹ In her carefully constructed monograph, Roy attempted to show that in the region of Bundelkhand there were several layers of action operating at the same time and that each needs to be considered in its own terms if we are to understand the wider pattern of revolt. She singled out for this purpose four groups of actors in the uprising: the sepoys, the

²⁸ C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, C 1780-1870*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

²⁹ Tapti Roy, *The Politics of a Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

rajas, the thakurs (the local lords) and the people. Roy noted the remarkable unity amongst the sepoys and maintained that, far from being anarchic, the sepoys sanctioned government; they simply wanted to be a part of the governing process. She also emphasized religion as the unifying factor for the sepoys, claiming that Hindus and Muslims put aside their differences in a joint effort to drive the Christians out of India.

From the 1990s there has been a further shift in the historical interpretation of 1857. There was a greater recognition that although the concept of modern nation was in its embryonic form, the rebel's sense of space was certainly larger than their village or region. Together they shared a common agenda: rejecting the British rule in India, which threatened their existence as a whole. The rebels of 1857 fought to restore a moral order that had been polluted by the colonial rule. As Gautam Bhadra wrote, the rebels' actions were determined by their day-to-day experience of the authority of the alien state.³⁰ C.A. Bayly saw in the events of 1857 a set of 'patriotic revolts'.³¹ This perception has been further developed by Rajat Kanta Ray. He has emphasised that in the uprising of 1857 the rebels constantly referred to the people of India as the 'Hindus and Mussulmans of Hindustan'.³² To Ray, this was a war of races that was not a race war because the subject race conceived it as a war of religion; a religious war that was not purely a war of religion as what was being opposed was not the creed of the master race but their political domination. It was

³⁰ Gautam Bhadra, "Four Rebels of Eighteen Fifty Seven", in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985: p. 275.

³¹ C. A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 88.

³² Rajat K. Ray, *The Felt Community: Commonalty and Mentality before the Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

not modern day nationalism and yet a patriotic war of the Hindu-Muslim brotherhood. As Ray puts it, '[I]t signified a confederation of two separate peoples bound together as one political unit by the shared perception of Hindustan as one land'.³³

In the recent years there has been a fresh initiative to revisit the events of 1857 in a new light. As Sabyasachi Bhattacharya has pointed out, 'the way we interrogate the past differs from generation to generation.'³⁴ The questions we ask today are moulded by the concerns of our times, which may be different from those of the past. In the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Mosque in the early 1990s and the subsequent resurgence of communal violence in Gujarat and elsewhere in India led many to reassess the question of religion in the formulation of India's identity as a secular state.³⁵ One of the central devices in the colonial historiography of the second half of the nineteenth century was to heavily underline the religious sentiment as a trigger cause for the uprising of 1857. Though this interpretation is not altogether new, it has recently attracted attention due to the interpretative stance taken by William Dalrymple in his much hyped work 'The Last Mughal'.³⁶ He has persuasively argued that the call for 'Jihad' was no more than a desperate attempt on the part of the Muslims to reclaim their lost power and positions. Hence, it would be

³³ Ray, *The Felt Community*: p. 358.

³⁴ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, ed. *Rethinking 1857*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007, p. xiv.

³⁵ For further details on the debates concerning secularism see the Introduction in Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007. Also see: Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, eds., *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007.

³⁶ William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857*, London: Bloomsbury, 2006. Also see: William Dalrymple, "Religious Rhetoric in the Delhi Uprising of 1857", in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Rethinking 1857*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007.

fictitious to say that there was anything close to nationalism associated with this. Dalrymple portrayed the uprisings as primarily a 'war of religion' between Islam and Christianity.³⁷ While acknowledging that the 'great majority' of the Sepoys were Hindus, he placed unprecedented emphasis on the presence in Delhi of 'insurgents (who) described themselves as mujahedin, ghazis and jihadis' and who, towards the end of the siege, came to constitute 'about a quarter of the total fighting force' in the city.

Rajat Kanta Ray has described how, in the case of 1857, people sharing a syncretic culture but identifying with distinct religions consciously united to fight the British colonizers. It was, in their view, 'a struggle of the Hindus and Muslims against the Nazarenes – not so much because the latter were supposed to be determined to impose the false doctrine of the Trinity, but because the identity of 'the Hindus and Muslims of Hindustan' was being threatened by the moral and material aggrandizement of the arrogant imperial power.'³⁸ As Seema Alavi has argued, 'both jihadis and Hindu rebel leaders and sepoys unproblematically used religious idioms and symbols to whip up anti-British support' during the rebellion.³⁹ Farhat Hasan, in his critique of William Dalrymple's study *The Last Mughal*, which he describes as an attempt to impose a 'rival fundamentalisms' scenario thesis onto 1857, has sought to refine the argument about the role of religion in the uprising. Hassan asserted that

³⁷ William Dalrymple, "Indian Mutiny Was 'War of Religion'", BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/5312092.stm. (accessed 26 December 2012); A more sensational version of this argument has been presented by Charles Allen. For further details see: Charles Allen, *God's Terrorist: Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad*, London: Da Capo Press, 2006.

³⁸ Ray, *The Felt Community*: p. 357.

³⁹ Seema Alavi, "Jihadi Muslims and Hindu Sepoys: Rewriting the 1857 Narrative," *Biblio: A Review of Books*, XII, nos. 3 and 4, 2007: 10-12.

‘jihad’, in the context of those events, did not connote ‘religious war’; rather the term was used by both Hindus and Muslims to infer a fight against injustice.⁴⁰ Dalrymple dismissed these more complex understandings of the anti-imperialist mass movements, which pre-dated the emergence of bourgeois nationalism in India in favour of the notion of a ‘clash of rival fundamentalisms’.⁴¹ Crispin Bates has pointed out that it would thus be fallacious to label the rebellion as a ‘war of religion’ since we are still lacking detailed knowledge of who joined the ranks of the Ghazis and more importantly what was their motivation in doing so.⁴²

In spite of several shortcomings in Dalrymple’s work, it is difficult however to dismiss one of his later claims. Dalrymple argues that ‘religion is not the only force at work, nor perhaps the primary one; but to ignore its power and importance, at least in the rhetoric used to justify the Uprising, seems to go against the huge weight of emphasis on this factor given in the rebels’ own documents’⁴³. The role of religion during the conflagration of 1857 has in fact continued to remain a sensitive issue and has not received as much attention as it deserves. Crispin Bates and Marina Carter have noted that for a whole range of scholars of Indian history, to acknowledge the role of religion in 1857 was to see ‘evidence of weakness of national

⁴⁰ Farhat Hasan, “Religious Shade of a Rebellion”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLII, Number. 19, 12 May 2007.

⁴¹ For a recent nuanced discussion on the religious perspective during the rebellion of 1857, see: Crispin Bates and Marina Carter, “Religion and Retribution in the Indian Rebellion of 1857,” *Leidschrift. Empire and Resistance: Religious beliefs versus the ruling power*, 24, no. 1, 2009: 51-68.

⁴² Bates and Carter, “Religion and Retribution”: p. 68.

⁴³ William Dalrymple, ‘In Defence of faith: Religious Rhetoric in the Delhi Uprising of 1857’ *Biblio*, vol. 12, no. 3 and 4, p. 9.

consciousness'.⁴⁴ Analyses of the causes of the rebellion of 1857 and of the rapid spread of disaffected groups across northern and eastern India, both at the time of the conflict and in succeeding years, stressed the very real importance of religious beliefs both as a reason for widespread feelings of alienation in regard to British rule and as a means of mobilisation of a variety of individuals and groups who felt compelled to take up arms in defence of their faith. From the rebel perspective the leaders found religion as a mobilising strategy could appeal to both Hindus and Muslims and adjusted their recruitment strategies accordingly. Fath-i-Islam (Victory to Islam), for example, called upon Hindus and Muslims to unite to drive out the English as the only effective means of preserving both their faiths. While doing so the rebels made use of the emotive language of religion to mobilise support. To cite one example, The Azamgarh Proclamation, which is attributed to Firoz Shah, asserted that both Hindus and Muslims were being 'ruined' by the 'infidel and treacherous English' and declared that it was his intention to 'extirpate the infidels' and to bring Hindus and Muslims together.⁴⁵ However, Bates and Carter noted that religion was not of significance solely to Indian belligerents. The British soldiers also acted upon and were inspired by perceptions of themselves as holy warriors, fighting an equally desperate battle, in which they envisaged themselves as the military wing of a civilising mission and believed that it was practically a religious duty to combat and crush the heathen.⁴⁶ To put it simply, for those in battle religion was an inspiration

⁴⁴ Crispin Bates and Marina Carter, "Holy Warriors: Religion as Military Modus Operandi", in Gavin Rand and Crispin Bates (eds.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Vol. 4: Military Aspects of the Indian Uprising, London: Sage Publications, 2013, pp. 41-60: p. 42.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Bates and Carter, "Holy Warriors": p. 47.

⁴⁶ Bates and Carter, "Holy Warriors": p.53.

for men on both sides to risk their lives. While rebellious sepoys fought for a new order founded upon faith, so the British envisaged themselves as the military wing of a global civilising mission, bent upon the extirpation of heathen savagery.

This posits another set of question in front of us. If the primary motive of the rebels was not merely religious, then what was the alternative polity envisaged by the rebels and what was the system with which they intended to replace that was created by the British? Tapti Roy in one of her recent essays tried to draw attention to the various tracts from the rebel side written in 1857 which were in the nature of chapbooks written in ‘kissa’ style, often containing tales about real life figures.⁴⁷ One may infer from Roy’s exposition that tracts like these presented a political agenda that were part of contemporary discourse. This dissertation partly draws upon this understanding of Roy and explores the extent to which the rebels operating in the lower province of Bengal and the regions further east attempted to establish an alternative polity and governmental order. The contents of the letters that were being circulated in Assam during the time of the rebellion clearly indicated that the rebels were trying to replace the colonial state and thus the question of alternative structure was an important element in the discussions.

The uprising of 1857 was indeed a multi-layered movement in a complex hierarchy. Rebellion meant different things to different people. Socially dominant groups tended to use the marginal members of society for their own purposes as a rule, but occasionally the latter acquired a measure of agency-hood and autonomy. Thus the history of interface between the struggles of dalits and tribal communities’

⁴⁷ Tapti Roy, “Rereading the Texts: Rebel Writings in 1857-58”, in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Rethinking 1857*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007.

and the campaign landed magnates undertook on the rebel side is of great significance. Only recently scholars in their own different way have tried to address this issue. L. N. Rana in his essay provided a detailed narrative of the disturbances in the Jharkhand region highlighting the active participation on the part of Cheros, Bhogta-Kharwar and Birjia tribes in the district of Palamau, while Sanjukta Dasgupta tried to show that the rebellion brought some of the tribal groups and the 'erstwhile ruling class in a united act of defiance against foreign rule' in Singhbhum.⁴⁸ Dasgupta in her essay questioned the subaltern historian's assertion of subaltern autonomy in the Ho rebellion and concluded that there were linkages between the elite ruling class and the tribal subjects. This multidimensional nature of the uprising and what it meant to the dalits has also been touched upon by Badri Narayan. An additional element that he brought into the analysis was the dalit memory and the transformation of the dalit participants in the 1857 uprising into objects of ritual worship by fellow dalits.⁴⁹ In a similar way, Shashank Sinha in his essay tried to focus on a predominantly tribal tract in Chotanagpur. Sinha especially explored the gender angle aspects that have hardly been touched upon as yet, although his exploration still tended to depict women involved in the uprising more as victims than as active participants.

⁴⁸ L. N. Rana, "The 1857 Uprising and the Civil Rebellion in Jharkhand", in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Rethinking 1857*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007; Sanjukta Dasgupta, "Rebellion in a 'Little Known' District of the Empire: 1857 and the Hos of Singhbhum", in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Rethinking 1857*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007. Also see: Sanjukta Dasgupta, "Remembering Gonoo: The Profile of an Adivasi Rebel of 1857", in Biswamoy Pati (ed.), *The Great Rebellion of 1857 in India: Exploring Transgressions, Contests and Diversities*, London; New York: Routledge, 2010.

⁴⁹ Badri Narayan, "Dalits and Memories of 1857", in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Rethinking 1857*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007.

Instead of confining themselves only to the colonial archives, many of these recent contributors to the historiography of 1857 have tried to reconstruct their past using works from local oral traditions thereby interrogating both the conventional and historical writings on 1857 and mainstream portrayals of dalit men and women and dalit writings on the subject. Taken together these new efforts have attempted to question the existing understanding of centre-periphery relations during the rebellion of 1857. This objective has been best explained in a recent essay by Gautam Bhadra. Writing in the context of the insurrection in Singhbhum during 1857 Bhadra has argued how the notion of the ‘margin’ was explicitly or implicitly present in the fashioning and perceiving of local insurgency in the context of an uprising covering a large part of India.⁵⁰

REGIONS BEYOND THE GANGETIC HEARTLAND – THE SITUATION IN BENGAL

Recovering lost voices was but one part of the agenda. The other was to recover the lost regions. In the course of understanding various complexities related to the rebellion of 1857, there was one common pattern that ran through all these works in spite of their differences in perception. Almost all of these works primarily centred their geographical parameters within the north-central Gangetic plains of northern India. In a way this was understandable since most of these writings tried to understand and analyse history in terms of acts of violence that were unfolding rather than the responses. From the colonial perspective, it was a ‘victor’s narrative’ that

⁵⁰ Gautam Bhadra, “What Constitutes a Margin or Margins? The Politics of Perception and the Representation of Power: The Insurrection of 1857 in Kolhan”, in Ciriwspin Bates (ed.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Vol. 1: Anticipations and Experiences in the Locality, London: Sage Publications, 2013, pp. 187-200.

celebrated the victors and defamed the vanquished. Where else to celebrate the innate superiority of the English character other than in the archetypal ‘mutiny countries’ as Edward Thompson has dubbed them?⁵¹ After all, Meerut, Delhi, Kanpur, Awadh, Rohilkhand and adjoining regions were the areas where the fate of the Company’s government was decided and which, therefore, provided the testing ground for heroism and other virtues of British character, as also the treachery and villainy of Indian behaviour. Following a similar pattern, albeit in a different approach, even the revisionist historians continued to focus primarily on these regions since it provided them with adequate evidences to showcase the bravado of the Indian actors or the participation of the civilians in the rebellion. But what they failed to appreciate was the fact that the acts of violence were not the only acts of resistance. As a result, we have come to know far more about Meerut, Delhi, Jhansi, Kanpur and Lucknow and precious little about other regions. It seemed as if it was assumed that except for parts of northern and parts of central India, other regions continued to remain firmly ensconced in the loyalist fold. According to the canonical version of the story, even tenor of life in Bengal or quietude of Madras was hardly disturbed. Thus, even the revisionist historiography of the rebellion remained virtually a prisoner to some of the shibboleths of traditional understanding. There were, of course a few notable exceptions.⁵² However, by and large the constricted framework of analysis remained

⁵¹ Edward John Thompson, *The Other Side of the Medal. [Observations on the Indian Mutiny.]*, London: L. & V. Woolf, 1925.

⁵² The study of the regions lying beyond the Gangetic heartland were touched upon in the passing by Sir John Kaye, Colonel G.B. Malleon and later by S.N. Sen and a few others in their respective works. However, for more substantial works done by scholars see for instance: Dolores Domin, *India in 1857-59: A Study in the Role of the Sikhs in the People’s Uprising*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1977; Khushhalilal Srivastava, *The Revolt of 1857 in Central India-Malwa*, Bombay, New

valid. The cumulative outcome of this tradition is a somewhat lopsided view that limits the geographical spread and analysis of the rebellion.

The present dissertation seeks to intervene in this context. As we examine the nature and character of the events of 1857 in the lower province of the Bengal Presidency it will be clear that the movement was far more complicated and multifaceted than has been acknowledged. The area that has roughly been covered in this study includes the present-day states of West Bengal and Assam in the north-east of India, Bangladesh, and touches upon the borders of Nepal and Bhutan. There are multiple reasons behind the selection of this region as the area of present research. Bengal was the initial 'British bridgehead' into the Indian subcontinent.⁵³ It was in this region that the East India Company had first established its base and had to encounter some serious challenges from the erstwhile ruling establishment in the province. The grant of Diwani in 1765 by the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II had provided the necessary impetus to the Company to extend its political control over other parts of India. During the period under review, the city of Calcutta was the capital and seat of the British Empire in the whole of South Asia. It was in Bengal that first signs of serious mutinous tendencies amongst the native army of the Company were noticed as early as in 1824.⁵⁴ When the rebellion broke out in 1857 the military cantonments of the lower province of the Bengal Presidency first set the ball rolling. The region witnessed a series of episodes of political unrest throughout

York: Allied Publishers, 1966; Nathu Ram Khadgawat, *Rajasthan's Role in the Struggle of 1857*, Jaipur: General Administration Dept., 1957.

⁵³ Peter James Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India 1740-1828*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

⁵⁴ For a detailed study on the Mutiny of the Bengal Army in 1824, see: Premansukumar Bandyopadhyay, *Tulsi Leaves and the Ganges Water: The Slogan of the First Sepoy Mutiny at Barrackpore, 1824*, Kolkata: K. P. Bagchi, 2003.

the course of the nineteenth century and was one of the prime centres during the later-day national movement against the colonial government. As we explore the course of events in and around Calcutta it will be clear from the official and unofficial correspondences that securing Calcutta from falling into the hands of the rebels of 1857 was considered in every respect an imperative for the continuation of the British Empire in the Indian subcontinent. In fact, considering the importance of Calcutta as the seat of the British Empire in south Asia, it might not be an exaggeration to say that the history of the rebellion of 1857 would perhaps have been altogether different had the rebels turned their attention towards Calcutta instead of Delhi.

The obvious question that comes to one's mind is why then does the study of this region in the context of the rebellion of 1857 continued to be omitted by historians from the grand narrative of events? The answer partly lies to the reasons already stated above. The rebellion has so far been studied and measured in terms of acts of violence and the counter insurgency and not so much so from the perspectives of the actors. It is thus unfortunate that in spite of Eric Stokes' pioneering intervention, even the revisionist historiography continues to remain constrained by the conventional understanding of the uprising. What they failed to comprehend is the fact that the issues that underlay the outburst in Delhi were arguably different from those in Awadh, just as the social basis of the grievances in Awadh were different from those in the lower province of Bengal or Assam or Madras Presidency. Each of the regions lying in the Gangetic heartland of India had their own regional specificities that determined the nature and character of the

rebellion. And yet all of these regions, with all their regional specificities, were interconnected to each other during the course of the rebellion of 1857.

What then was the situation prevailing in the lower province of the Bengal Presidency when the rebellion broke out in 1857? Was the act committed by sepoy Mangal Pandey of the 34th Bengal Native Infantry in the cantonment of Barrackpore an isolated act of individual bravado? Was it neither preceded by any agitational run-up nor followed by any radical alteration in eastern India's relationship with the Company's government? How far were these incidents connected with the grand narrative of the events that were unfolding in the Gangetic heartland of India? What was the nature and extent of the network of communication that the rebels had established within the region and to what extent were these linked to the events unfolding in the other regions? Was there any precise trajectory that was being followed by the rebels or were mere manifestations of some sporadic local outbursts? What was the nature and response of the colonial state and to what extent did they manage to overcome this crisis? These are some of the fundamental questions that have been dealt throughout the course of this project.

METHODOLOGY

To answer the questions posed above one needs to tread carefully through a very problematic terrain. Unlike the events unfolding in the Gangetic heartland, whereby the 'actions' of the rebels and the counter-insurgency of the colonial state were starkly visible, the region covered in the present study looks more at the responses and reactions of the actors from a different perspective. The attempt is made not just to construct a narrative of events that was hitherto uncharted, but also to look at some

of the moments of crisis that the colonial state had to encounter in the period under review. It needs to be acknowledged that the sources are mostly based on the official correspondences and government reports preserved in the libraries and archives. The paucity of Indian accounts poses a real problem, and historians have access to only a very limited range of sources representing, with greater or less accuracy, the voice of a mere handful of either rebel or loyal Indians. Any conclusions based on such a limited amount of material obviously cannot make any claims to be comprehensive. This entails, at times, a disproportionate focus on the British experience. In the thesis I have endeavoured to supplement and make the best use, wherever possible, of non-governmental sources, such as the memoirs, contemporary accounts, personal letters, diaries and newspaper reports to provide a glimpse into a variety of perceptions related to the rebellion. Nevertheless, even these sources were not always unbiased. Many a times, these were written under 'official guidance' or had to be passed through the government censorships before getting published, thereby making the task further complicated. Yet within the given constraints, using unexplored and often overlooked sources, it seems possible to offer a different construction that would help to clarify and rethink some of the conventional notions about the uprising.

Central to my approach is the idea that rumour and panic, when studied in a particular situation, such as the crisis of 1857, is a potent source of historical tool of analysis. My study draws on the methodologies adopted by Guha, Homi Bhaba and others as discussed below. However it must be mentioned at the very outset that most of the available literature on this theme have focussed on a pre-modern, pre-capitalist, and most importantly, traditional rural settings where the formal modes of

communications were not much in operation and therefore the chance of the spread of rumour and subsequent panic was much more plausible. However, as I will show in the present study, and this is where this dissertation takes the scope of the existing literatures a step further: the effect of rumour during a moment of social and political upheaval, such as the rebellion of 1857, could be equally compelling even in the urban centres where all the formal modes of communications were present. The cumulative effect of actual outburst of events taking place elsewhere followed by circulations of rumours through various informal networks of communication invalidated most of these modern communication technologies of the colonial government.

Rumours are loosely described as an anonymously generated, unverifiable speech which flourishes in contingent situations where there is a lack of information. They can be a potent source of historical representation.⁵⁵ They explain ambivalent circumstances, especially when these have ramifications upon many and are considered significant in historical situations. Ralph Rosnow and Gary Alan Fine have defined rumour as ‘a process of information dispersion as well as the product of that process’.⁵⁶ In one of their earlier works on rumour, Gordon Williard Allport and Leo Postman had also drew a connection between the content of rumours and their manner of dissemination, concluding that messages will be spread as rumours if their subject matter is both significant and ambiguous within a particular society.⁵⁷ In other words, the strength of the rumour would vary with the importance of the

⁵⁵ Anjan Ghosh, “The Role of Rumour in History Writing,” *History Compass*, 5, no. 6, 2008: 1235–43.

⁵⁶ Ralph Leon Rosnow and Gary Alan Fine, *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay*, New York; Oxford: Elsevier, 1976.

⁵⁷ Gordon Willard Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor*, New York: Holt, 1947.

subject to the individual concerned and the ambiguity of the evidence pertaining to the topic at hand. Tamotsu Shibutani too had given importance to the ambiguity of situations in which rumours arise. He explained rumouring as a problem-solving strategy in which people try to create meaning and find consensus about uncertainties.⁵⁸ Also, as Homi Bhabha has argued, in specifically political contexts, rumours have been identified as a phenomenon of crisis, often related to violence and terror.⁵⁹

One of the most significant aspects about rumours according to Jean-Noel Kapferer, President of the Foundation for the Study and Information on Rumours in Paris, is not the question whether they are right or wrong, but that people deem them important enough to tell other people about them.⁶⁰ This draws our attention to the manner in which rumours spread in a society. Although rumours are certainly told and retold it appears that they disseminate by themselves, like contagious diseases. Accordingly, some scholars have employed disease metaphors to describe the life-cycle of rumours.⁶¹ Rumours do not depend on authorial positions but roam about in

⁵⁸ Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor*, An Advanced Study in Sociology, Indianapolis,: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966, p.17.

⁵⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, "In a Spirit of Calm Violence", in Gyan Prakash (ed.), *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1994.

⁶⁰ Jean-Noel Kapferer, *Rumors: Uses, Interpretations and Images*, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1990. Kapferer is the President of the Foundation for the Study and Information on Rumours, Paris, and also Professor of Communication at L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales and l'Institut Supérieur des Affaires, Paris, France. This point has also been shared by Kim Wagner. Kim A. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010, p. 23.

⁶¹ Edgar Morin, *Rumour in Orléans*, New York: Pantheon, 1971.

a network-like fashion. Because of this decentralized manner of their dispersal, rumours are difficult to control – if at all.⁶²

Homi Bhabha maintained that the indeterminacy of rumour constituted its importance as a social discourse. Its intersubjective, communal adhesiveness lies in its enunciative aspect. Its performative power of circulation results in a contagious spreading ‘an almost uncontrollable impulse to pass it on to another person.’⁶³ Further, once a rumour has started, it is very probable that other, related rumours start too because rumours are frequently constructed in response to other rumours. Rumour travels when events have importance in the lives of individuals and when the news received about them is either lacking or subjectively ambiguous. The ambiguity may arise from the fact that the news is not clearly reported, or from the fact that conflicting versions of the news have reached the individual, or from his incapacity to comprehend the news he receives under certain circumstances. The more prominence the press gives the news – especially momentous news – the more numerous and serious are the rumoured distortions this news will undergo.

Writing on rumours preceding the Indian uprising against the British in 1857, Homi Bhabha linked rumours via their iterative qualities of circulation and contagion with panic and thereby draws attention to the affective quality of rumour.⁶⁴ He discussed the sudden circulation of chapatis in northern Indian villages, chapatis that were imbued with some mysterious and inexplicable foreshadowing of violence and insurgency. The panic of the Indian subalterns was paralleled by panic among the

⁶² Glen A. Perice, “Rumors and Politics in Haiti,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 70, no. 1, 1997: 1-10.

⁶³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 332.

⁶⁴ Bhabha, “In a Spirit of Calm Violence,” p. 332.

British colonizers who were unable to make a reassuring sense out of the stories of circulating flat-bread.⁶⁵

Ranajit Guha has argued that since rumours by nature were ambiguous and could not be pinned down, it was therefore ‘a mobile and explosive agent of insurgency’.⁶⁶ Guha also pointed out the socialising process – the comradeship response – which the rumour generates and contributes to its phenomenal speed.⁶⁷ The speed, with which the rumours about the impending fall of the British Empire in India were circulated during the rebellion of 1857, not only left the administration clueless, but also made the rebels the agents of forces outside and independent of themselves. Mention may also be made in this context the importance of rumours and panics during the course of the uprising described by Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Kim Wagner.⁶⁸ Drawing a parallel with the ‘Great Fear’ during the French Revolution, Mukherjee has convincingly touched upon the way rumours often acted as a ‘springboard for sepoy action.’⁶⁹ Rumour, fear and panic, for all their irrationality, brought men together, stoked their hatred and spurred them to violent action. In a similar way Wagner too has argued that the important aspect in the circulation of rumours was not the ‘objective truth’ it carried but what the people ‘believed’ it was carrying. In other words, the accuracy of rumours, with all its ambiguities, was essentially immaterial since whether or not they were true, they had

⁶⁵ For further readings on the Chapati circulation, see Troy Downs, “Host of Midian: The Chapati Circulation and the Indian Revolt of 1857-58,” *Studies in History*, 16, no. 1, 2000: 75-107; Kim A. Wagner, “‘Treading Upon Fires’: The ‘Mutiny’-Motif and Colonial Anxieties in British India”, *Past and Present*, 218, no. 1, 2013: 159-197.

⁶⁶ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*: p. 256.

⁶⁷ Guha, *Elementary Aspects*: p. 257.

⁶⁸ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*; Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*.

⁶⁹ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 72.

very real consequences.⁷⁰ It was this ‘belief’ about what was being done and the consequent panic that stirred men into feverish activity. As I argue in the course of this dissertation, this ‘belief’ not just stirred the common people into ‘action’, but was responsible for creating an atmosphere of panic among the colonial government that acted as a catalyst in bringing about a crisis in the colonial state during this time.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE ARGUMENT

The thesis is roughly organized into two main themes. Chapter one will set the basic context within which the rebellion needs to be analysed. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 follow a spatial and chronological sequence that looks at some of the moments of crisis as it unfolded in the area under the present purview. This would not only allow us to construct a narrative (to the extent that the sources permit us) hitherto unexplored, but more importantly would help us look more closely at the various nuances and themes that has been discussed within this narrative. The second theme has been discussed in Chapter 5, which moves away from the political history to a more intellectual domain. This chapter deals with the contemporary response of the middle class intelligentsia of Bengal and revisits the question of ‘loyalism’ during the rebellion of 1857.

Chapter 1 opens by looking at the formation, composition and the recruitment pattern of the Bengal Native Infantry in a historical perspective. The purpose of the chapter is to highlight some of the key facts through which it would be possible to understand the regional specificities in the lower province of Bengal. It is by looking at the structural organization, the social origins of the army and the pattern of

⁷⁰ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: p. 23.

recruitment that would explain the differential impact and character of the rebellion. Chapter 2, 3 and 4 would follow a chronological and spatial sequence that looks at some of the moments of crisis that the colonial government had to encounter in this period. This narrative suggests, contrary to the conventional perception, that the rebels of 1857, operating at different levels, were involved in a fight for power, attempting to capture nothing less than the apparatus of the state. Chapter 2 primarily focuses on the role of rumour as a historical tool of analysis and how the cumulative effects of rumour and actual events unfolding in the region determined the actions of the people and the colonial state. Drawing a parallel to the Straits Settlements, the chapter highlights the efficacy of rumours transcending the regional/national boundaries. The exigency of the situation can be determined either by the acts of violence committed by the actors involved, as was the case in Awadh or in Delhi, or by the preventive measures adopted by the colonial government, as was the case in the lower province of Bengal and Assam in the north-east. The chapter would show that under a given situation the effects of rumour and panic could be as compelling as the actual events and incidents. In a way, the objective of this chapter would thus be to interrogate rumours, panics and their consequences as an object of study in their own right.

Chapter three follows the logic of argument from chapter two but goes on a step further. This chapter would look at the resultant effects of rumour leading to the ‘actual’ outbreak of rebellion in the cantonments and its repercussions in the surrounding regions. In this context the chapter also deals with the role of the various actors involved either in the ‘mutinous conspiracies’ or in open acts of rebellion. Attempts have been made to situate the rebellion within the wider socio-political

condition of the time. In addition, focus has been given to the role of the European sailors who were hastily recruited by the colonial government in the region to bring down the spirit of rebellion.

Chapter four moves from the lower province of the Bengal Presidency to the north-east frontier of India in Assam. This chapter presents a contrasting study and makes a departure from the previous two in the sense that unlike the lower province of Bengal, Assam and the north-east region came under the direct control of the colonial government only about two decades before the rebellion broke out in 1857. The specificities of this region determined the nature, character and the eventual suppression of the intended rebellion. Assam was under the dynastic rule of the Ahom kings for the preceding six centuries. The chapter opens with a brief discussion of the situation that was prevailing in Assam prior to the outbreak of the rebellion. The introduction of colonial government necessitated certain significant and far-reaching changes in the socio-economic and political life of Assam that to a large extent played a determining role during the rebellion of 1857. The second half of the chapter will explore the ways in which the existing dissatisfaction of the region got intertwined with the wider conflagration of 1857 and the network of communication that was established between the ‘rebels’ in the region with their fellows in the Gangetic heartland. Finally, the chapter would examine the ways in which the colonial state eventually managed to curb out the rebellious elements of the region and brought an abrupt end to the intended uprising and the alternative polity in Assam.

The differential responses and reactions towards the rebellion were also reflected in the writings of the intelligentsia of Bengal. Chapter 5 argues that as a

product of the colonial rule, the Calcutta intelligentsia never openly supported the outbursts of rebellion since they believed that the rebellion would put the country in a total chaos. Nonetheless, they were sympathetic to the cause of the rebels and connected them with the broader issues of disaffection towards the colonial rule. The chapter would thus argue that the usage of the terminologies such as 'loyal' or 'rebel' towards the middle class intelligentsia of Bengal is problematic. From the writings of the contemporary intellectuals during the time of the rebellion it would argue that the nature of opposition towards the colonial rule was reflected through writings in a rhetoric that was certainly different from that of rebel leaders of 1857. But even though the forms of opposition were different, they emanated from the similar sets of discontents. The rebellion of 1857 was in this context a watershed event that not only evoked the contemporary thinkers to revisit the ill effects of the colonial rule in India, but would play a pivotal role in shaping the later day discourse of nationalism.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ARMY IN BENGAL AND THE REBELLION OF 1857

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1857, the British East India Company controlled more than 1.6 million square miles of territory on the subcontinent, including the newly annexed states of Sind (1843) and Punjab (1849). This vast area was controlled and protected by an equally vast military force, composed of three distinct armies centred on the Presidencies of Madras, Bombay, and Bengal. By the year 1852, the total strength of the Bengal army had surpassed 50,000, and, by the time the rebellion broke out in 1857, the total strength of the native Indian army was 232,224 out of which the Bengal army was by far the largest with 135,767 troops.¹ Of this army it had often been said that ‘an army was built up from the people of India themselves, which in the end brought its own country under the sway of its foreign masters’.² In 1856, the combined native troops alone numbered 280,000 men and, along with the European forces numbering about 40,000 made it the largest all-volunteer mercenary army in the world and a powerful strategic tool for British world dominance.³ Yet just one year later its strongest military arm – the Bengal Army – looked as though it might also prove to be the downfall of British rule in India.

¹ ‘Return showing the number of the troops, regular and irregular, which were serving in the three Presidencies immediately before the Mutiny’, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (HCPP), 1859, Vol.: V, Appendix 17, p.: 379.

² Sheppard, *A Short History of the British Army*: p. 264.

³ Peter Stanley, *White Mutiny: British Military Culture in India, 1825-1875*, London: Hurst, 1998, p. 9; T.A. Heathcote, “The Army of British India,” in David Chandler (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994: p. 381.

Viewed in this light it becomes an imperative to acknowledge that the rebellion of 1857 was first and foremost a military uprising centred on the army in Bengal. The mutiny or disbandment of sixty-nine out of the seventy-four regiments of the Bengal army stood at the core of all the occurrences.⁴ A mutinous army represents a case of curious anomaly whereby the instrument of legitimate force itself questions the very source of its legitimacy, the very embodiment of order becoming a body of rebellious men. As Tapti Roy has argued ‘when an army rebels it marks, in the most immediate and palpable sense, a crisis of the state.’⁵ The purpose of this chapter is to establish the fact that in the course of the uprising, it was the socio-cultural ties, composition and the recruitment pattern of the Bengal army that would eventually determine the areas that would be most affected by the conflagration of 1857. As Hurrish Chandra Mukherji, the editor of *Hindoo Patriot*, noted, ‘the Indian army has a discipline peculiarly its own. It has been kept together as much by the usual modes of military organisation as by the peculiar composition of its elements which determines its fidelity to the region he originates from’.⁶ The composition and recruitment of the Bengal army, which established it as mainly a peasant force from the Indo-Gangetic area, points to the areas where it would find common ground of disaffection with the civil population. It is these same features, which would also determine the differential nature of their participation in the areas beyond the Gangetic heartland. Despite having instances of open mutinies in various

⁴ David E. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940*, London: Macmillan, 1998, p. 9.

⁵ Roy, *The Politics of a Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857*: p. 21.

⁶ “The Mutinies”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 2 April 1857, in Benoy Ghose (ed.), *Selections from English Periodicals of 19th Century Bengal*, vol. 4: 1857, *Hindoo Patriot; Friend of India; Hindu Intelligencer; Bengal Hurkaru*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 1979, pp. 20-21.

cantonments in the lower provinces of the Bengal presidency, as we shall see in the course of this thesis, it remained limited in its scope and character.

In order to elucidate the point further, it will be interesting to first have a brief outline of the rebellion as it unfolded in the Gangetic heartland. As we shall notice in the discussion, in every instances of the rebellion, it was first and foremost the mutiny of the native sepoys in the cantonments that set the ball rolling, followed by the participation of civilians in certain areas. The underlying purpose of this section is also to have a comparative framework for the analysis of the rebellion in the north-central Gangetic heartland and the lower province of the Bengal presidency.

1.2 THE CENTRALITY OF THE ARMY IN BENGAL: THE OUTLINE OF THE REBELLION

The rebellion of 1857 was initially sparked off by the sepoys belonging to the Bengal Artillery in the school of Musketry in Dumdum located on the outskirts of Calcutta. Despite repeated attempts by the colonial authorities to diffuse the already tensed situation, what appeared to be a minor crisis escalated and led to more serious incidents at Barrackpore, the headquarters of the Presidency Division of the Bengal Native Infantry.⁷ The initial mutual distrust between the colonial government and the sepoys of the Bengal army eventually culminated in an open rebellion of the army belonging to the 34th regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry in the cantonment of Barrackpore on 29 March 1857 and the subsequent disbandment of the seven companies of sepoys belonging to the regiment. The news of the rebellion spread from Barrackpore to Meerut, the head-quarters of the Bengal Artillery at that time. On 10 May 1857, the sepoys stationed at Meerut belonging to the 3rd Bengal light

⁷ See Chapter 2 for further details.

Cavalry, and the 20th and 11th regiments of Native Infantry mutinied, killed the officers and some other Europeans, plundered the bungalows of the cantonment and proceeded to Delhi.⁸ On 11 May 1857, Delhi was under siege by the mutineers that now consisted of, apart from the division from Meerut, sepoys belonging to the 5th Light Field Battery, Foot Artillery, 3rd Battalion 2nd Company, and the 38th and 54th Native Infantry.⁹ With the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar taking up the nominal leadership of the rebels sepoys, Delhi became the springboard of the sepoy operations.¹⁰

After the fall of Delhi, the mutiny of the sepoys spread like wild fire across the various cantonments of northern India. By the end of May 1857, the whole of the Gangetic heartland was in ferment. A handful of British officials looked in vain for support and fresh reinforcements from outside. Station after station fell to the

⁸ “The Mutinies”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 21 May 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: pp. 57-59. For further details on the mutiny in Meerut, see: Francis Spencer Wigram, *Mutiny at Meerut, 1857-58: Being Extracts from Letters from the Joint-Magistrate of That Station*, Southampton: Crabnion Industrial School, 1858; Julian Arthur Beaufort Palmer, *The Mutiny Outbreak at Meerut in 1857*, Cambridge South Asian Studies, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.

⁹ “The Indian Mutiny”, *Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, Friday 29 May 1857, p. 507. For details see: Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 184. The mutiny and siege of Delhi during 1857 has been dealt with in details in various works over the period of time. See for instance: Keith Young and Henry W. Norman, *Delhi - 1857: The Siege, Assault, and Capture as Given in the Diary and Correspondence of the Late Colonel Keith Young*, London: W. & R. Chambers, 1902; Charles John Griffiths, *A Narrative of the Siege of Delhi with an Account of the Mutiny at Ferozepore in 1857*, edited by Henry John Yonge. London: J. Murray, 1910; Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny, India 1857*, London: Allen Lane, 1978. For the recent works on Delhi during the rebellion of 1857, see: William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857*, London: Bloomsbury, 2006; Mahmood Farooqui, *Besieged: Voices from Delhi, 1857*, New Delhi: Penguin Books: Viking, 2010.

¹⁰ “The Mutiny at Delhi”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 9 July 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: pp. 111-114.

mutiny.¹¹ As the message of the rebellion spread to small stations and cantonments, attention turned towards the bigger stations. On 30 May 1857, the sepoy regiments of the 7th light Cavalry, 13th, 48th and 71st Native Infantry mutinied in Lucknow.¹² This was immediately followed by the mutiny of the sepoys belonging to the 18th, 68th Native Infantry, 15th Light Field battery and 8th irregular Cavalry in Bareilly.¹³ As *Hindoo Patriot* noted, 'Lucknow was in many respects entitled to be considered the central seat of Sepoy disaffection. It is the capital of a province from which *the native army is principally recruited*, and where therefore the Sepoy feeling of the day must prevail with the greatest force'.¹⁴ Once the Lucknow garrison had mutinied the out stations followed in quick succession: Sitapur, Faizabad, Gonda-Bahraich, Sultanpur and Salon.¹⁵ The fall of one station contributed to a rising of sepoys in another garrison. Each successful mutiny was seen as the growing weakness – or the fall – of British power. The cantonments at Kanpur were the next in line to fall. On 4

¹¹ P. J. O. Taylor, *A Star Shall Fall: India 1857*, New Delhi: Indus, 1993, p. 17.

¹² Letter sent from Henry Lawrence to Governor-General in Council dated 31 May 1857, Foreign Department Secret Consultations Number 575, 18 December 1857, Government of India, NAI.

¹³ "The Mutinies", *Hindoo Patriot*, 4 June 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 74. For further details on the siege of Lucknow during 1857 see: Martin Richard Gubbins, *An Account of the Mutinies in Oudh, and of the Siege of the Lucknow Residency*, London: Richard Bentley, 1858; P. J. O. Taylor, *A Feeling of Quiet Power: The Siege of Lucknow, 1857*, New Delhi: Indus, 1994; Roshan Taqui, *Lucknow 1857 : The Two Wars of Lucknow - the Dusk of an Era*, Lucknow: New Royal Book Co., 2001; William Forbes-Mitchell, *Reminiscences of the Great Mutiny, 1857-59 : Including the Relief, Siege, and Capture of Lucknow, and the Campaigns in Rohilkund and Oude*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2002. For the uprising in Bareilly see Aniruddha Ray, *Bareilly Rising of 1857-1859 and the Bengali Babu*, Kolkata: Progressive Publishers, 2010.

¹⁴ "The Mutinies", *Hindoo Patriot*, 4 June 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 74. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵ Special Narrative of Events dated 5 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 328 (a), 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

June 1857, four sepoy regiments belonging to 2nd Light Cavalry, 1st, 74th and 56th Native Infantry rose in arms.¹⁶ Likewise, in Bundelkhand, Jhansi took the initial lead.¹⁷ On 6 June 1857, the entire cantonment was up in arms against the British.¹⁸ The uprising in Jhansi was soon followed by mutinies in four other towns of Bundelkhand. All the sepoys belonging to the 12th Bengal Native Infantry assembled and then split themselves up in smaller groups, after which they broke open the prisons, released all the prisoners, and set fire to the officer's bungalows.¹⁹

Once the rebellion of the sepoys in the cantonments of the provinces in the Gangetic heartland was met with initial success and the prospect of the overthrow of the colonial rule was seemingly visible, support now came from various quarters of the civil population. For instance, in Awadh some of the talukdars and members of the Nawabi bureaucracy had joined the rebellion. As Rudrangshu Mukherjee had noted, it was only when the mutinies in each and every station had succeeded and British administration in Awadh had collapsed 'like a house made of cards' did the Talukdars and their men decided to act.²⁰ Before this almost every Talukdar looked

¹⁶ Letter sent from Henry Lawrence to Canning dated 6 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 478, 10 August 1857, Government of India, WBSA. Also see: "The Mutinies", *Hindoo Patriot*, 11 June 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 84.

¹⁷ Bundelkhand refers to a part of the United Provinces, which included the districts of Jalaun, Jhansi, Hamirpur, Banda and parts of Allahabad that lies south of the rivers Jamuna and the Ganges. The region derived its name from the Bundela Thakurs, the most important clan inhabiting it. Sir William Wilson Hunter, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. 9, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908, p. 68.

¹⁸ "The Mutinies", *Hindoo Patriot*, 18 June 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 94. For a detailed study see: Roy, *The Politics of a Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857*.

¹⁹ "Written deposition of a native in Bengal" in Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi and Moti Lal Bhargava, eds., *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh: Source-Material*, vol. 3, Lucknow: Publications Bureau, Information Dept. Uttar Pradesh, 1957, pp. 29-46.

²⁰ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 80.

on while the sepoys raised the banner of mutiny. Similarly, the Rajah of Mahmudabad provided the leadership to the rebel sepoys of Sitapur in the battle of Chinhhat.²¹ The news of the British defeat at Chinhhat spread quickly and it became an accepted fact that the Company's rule had indeed come to an end and the 'Nawabi' rule has been restored.²² The news of this defeat augmented the efforts of the talukdars and their peasants to join the rebellion wholeheartedly. As a result, in the countryside the rebellion of the sepoys acquired a popular character. This was also visible in the district of Unao, to the south of Lucknow, where the rebels were inseparable from the rural populace.²³ The city of Lucknow in fact witnessed the most prominent instances of the transformation of the mutiny of the sepoys into a civil uprising. By the end of September 1857 when the imperial city of Delhi was recaptured by the British forces and the colonial authority was re-established, the rebel forces turned to their other seat of power in northern India, Lucknow. These forces were soon reinforced by the Awadh talukdars like Man Singh, Hanwant Singh, the Rajah of Amethi and their entourage.²⁴ Given the networks of loyalty in the rural countryside of Awadh, these talukdars could supply the forces with tenants, peasants and clansmen who lived on their land. In addition, small magnates who

²¹ Letter sent from Henry Lawrence to Governor-General Canning dated 6 August 1857, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (HCPP), Further Papers (Number 9 in continuation of Number 7), Insurrection in the East Indies Presented to both the Houses of Parliament, Enclosure in Number 28, p. 868, BLOC.

²² Letter sent from Charles Wingfield to G.F. Edmonstone dated 1 July 1857, Foreign Department Secret Consultations Number 520, 25 September 1857, Government of India, NAI.

²³ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 85.

²⁴ Special Narrative of Events dated 26 December 1857, Judicial Department Proceedings Number 278, 31 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA. For the details of the Awadh talukdars and the men they supplied during the siege of Lucknow, see: Chapter 4: "The Revolt of the People" in Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*.

could provide a few hundred men were also prepared to throw in their lot. In fact, as Mukherjee pointed out, almost sixty per cent of the rebel forces were drawn from the general rural populace.²⁵ It was only after the mutinous sepoys had returned to their respective localities from where they were recruited, and extended their support to the disaffected landed elites, as was the case in Awadh and elsewhere, that the conditions were fulfilled and the rebellion of the army was transformed into a civil rebellion.

1.3 THE ORIGIN AND RECRUITMENT PATTERN OF THE BENGAL ARMY

The preceding section discussed in brief the outline of the rebellion, emphasising that in every instances of mutiny in 1857, it was the sepoys that raised the banner of rebellion, which was then followed by the participation of different sections of civil population. More importantly, we could determine the areas where the conflagration was taking place. Following this as we move on to the present section it will be clear that the areas where the rebellion had metamorphosed into a wide-scale mass participation, corresponded with the regions from where the sepoys were principally recruited. The underlying argument being that from the Bengal army's origin till the outbreak of the rebellion in 1857, lower province of Bengal presidency (primarily the regions covered by present-day state of West Bengal and Bangladesh) were never considered ideal for the recruitment of sepoys by the colonial government. As a consequence when the rebellion broke out in 1857, the mutinies of the sepoys were limited in its scope. Although there were quite a few instances of open outbreak of

²⁵ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 95.

mutiny of the sepoys in the cantonments of the lower province of Bengal, these were mostly limited within the cantonments.

With the ascendancy of the British in Bengal from around the mid-eighteenth centuries, with its increased territorial control and higher political and military position, the East India Company needed to have a regular force of military was urgent in Bengal. But considering the paucity of the available English troops in Bengal Robert Clive, following the existing system of recruitment in Madras presidency, decided to raise a few hundred natives ‘with due regard to their physical and other military qualifications’.²⁶ These men were not the native inhabitants of Calcutta or the lower province of Bengal, but were chosen from the agricultural classes of northern India and the military adventurers who had come to Bengal in the service of the Afghans and the Mughals. Most of these men came from Bihar, Awadh, the Doab, Rohilkhand, and even from beyond the Indus, which included the Pathans, Rohillas, Jats and some Rajputs.²⁷ The British army’s definite preference for recruitment was the agricultural labourers, highlanders and men from the countryside. Thus, right from its very inception, the Company officials in India too were of the view that the agricultural classes of India made the best soldiers and accordingly differentiated the agrarian zones from which the recruitment were to take place. They were of the view that, as was the practice in nineteenth century Britain, the agricultural classes were best suited for military recruitment. According to Robert Orme, the Company ideologue of the 1750s, the inhabitants of the wheat-producing zones of northern India were better built and thus more ‘martial’ than the shorter

²⁶ Broome, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Bengal Army*: p. 92.

²⁷ Barat, *The Bengal Native Infantry*: p. 4.

people in the rice-producing areas of south and east.²⁸ In practice this meant that the recruitment was to be guided by two main considerations: the Company would only consider peasants with a well-built physique and an average height of 5 feet 7 inches; secondly, at this stage, at least, it confined recruitment to the Company's territories and established direct contact with the recruiting villages in wheat-growing areas.²⁹

It is interesting to note in this context that although sepoy were easily available by recruiting the former members of the Nawab of Bengal's army, the English deemed them ill-equipped since these sepoy did not conform to the Company's image of a 'good soldier'.³⁰ The ex-Nawab's army was composed mainly of urban-based Afghan and Pathan risaldars and were supplemented by a force of about 10,000 Bengal musketeers stationed in different parts of the province. In Alavi's opinion, it was possibly the political considerations that lay behind the decision to dispense with the predominantly Muslim soldiers associated with the former regime.³¹ The Bengal government observed that 'the Moors were bound by no ties of gratitude and every day's experience convinced us that Mussalmans would remain firm to the engagements no longer than while they were actuated by principles of fear, always ripe for a change wherever there was the smallest prospect

²⁸ J.P. Guha (ed.), R. Orme, *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire, of the Marattos, and of the English Concern in Indostan from the year MDCLIX*, London 1782, New Delhi: Associated Press, 1974 (Reprint), p. 303.

²⁹ Major Stainforth to R. Kyd, Secretary to the Governor-General-in-Council dated 9 March 1779, Bengal Military Consultations P/18/47, 17 March 1779, OIOC. Durgadas Bandopadhyay, a Bengali clerk who was attached with the Company's native regiments during the 1850s, in his memoirs also pointed out similar such considerations for the recruitment. See: Durgadas Bandopadhyay, *Amar Jivana-Charit (My Autobiography)*, Calcutta: Ananya Publishers, 1924, p. 42.

³⁰ P.J. Marshall, *The New Cambridge History of India, Bengal: The British Bridgehead, Eastern India 1740-1828*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 138.

³¹ Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*: p. 38.

of success.³² Dirk Kolff had also pointed out that the Company's gradual reliance on recruits from outside Bengal proper stemmed partly from the fact that the majority of the two thousand sepoys who fought with Clive in the battle of Plassey were brought from Madras, but had names that indicated a Rajput or North Indian origin.³³ These new recruits were clothed by the Company, armed with firelocks rather than matchlocks, commanded by European officers and 'drilled and disciplined according to the methods first tried out in the south in the decades preceding Plassey.'³⁴ They came to be known by the old name of *Purbia* and were simply 'new incarnations of the same old soldiering tradition of Hindustan' in which Rajputs and pseudo-Rajputs from *Purab* – a term that describes Awadh, Bihar and Benares region – had travelled far and wide to find employers. These men from the 'Purab' in general, and especially so in Awadh, would supply the majority of the recruits for the Bengal Native Infantry right up until the outbreak of the rebellion in 1857.

Historians have admitted difficulties in finding more specific quantitative statements about the exact number of sepoys recruited from in and around Awadh.³⁵ Some of them did attempt some rough estimates of the number of recruits that came from Awadh. Major-General Sir Jasper Nicholls in a report to the Select Committee in 1831 stated that 'the whole sepoy army of Bengal is drawn from the Company's provinces of Bihar and Oudh, with very few exceptions.'³⁶ A few years later William Sleeman, a noted administrator and also a soldier, too had observed that 'the three-

³² Rev. James Long, *Selections from the Unpublished Records of Government for the Years 1748 to 1767 Inclusive Relating Mainly to the Social Condition of Bengal*, Calcutta: Office of Superintendent of Government Printing, 1869, p. 151.

³³ Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*: pp. 177-78.

³⁴ Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*: p. 178.

³⁵ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 77.

³⁶ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Volume XIII, Number 735-V, 1831-32, p. 21, OIOC.

fourth of the recruits of our Bengal Native Infantry are drawn from the Rajput peasantry of the kingdom of Oudh.³⁷ According to Sleeman's estimate, Baiswara in southern Awadh, had by 1825 supplied approximately 30,000 men to the Company's army and almost every village had at least a member in the Company's service.³⁸ Colonel Keith Young, in his testimony before the Commission for the Reorganisation of the Indian Army in 1859, also remarked that 'Oude and the adjacent districts that were formerly under the Oude Government furnish about three-fourths of the recruits for the Bengal Infantry.'³⁹ Even General Sir Patrick Grant, a former Adjutant-General of the Bengal army, informed the Peel Commission that the recruits for the Bengal army were drawn 'chiefly from Oude, a few from the Punjaub, and the rest from Bhajepoor (in Bihar) and the Doab.'⁴⁰ In spite of the difficulties in procuring the estimates of the recruits from Awadh, Rudrangshu Mukherjee in his study has referred to one such document which offered a fairly detailed account of the extent of the non-commissioned officers and sepoy of the 22nd Native Infantry.⁴¹ This document provided names, castes, villages and parganas of 280 men, of whom only five percentages were from outside Awadh. The remainder came mainly from the southern districts of Awadh, i.e., the districts of Sultanpur, Pratapgarh and Rae Bareilly, the area corresponding roughly to Baiswara

³⁷ Lieutenant-Colonel William H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*, London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1844, p. 624.

³⁸ Major-General Sir William. H. Sleeman, *A Journey through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849-1850 with Private Correspondence Relative to the Annexation of Oude to British India, and C.*, 2 vols., vol. 1, London: Richard Bentley, 1858, p. 170.

³⁹ Reorganization of Indian Army: Papers received from Col. Keith Young, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Volume VII, 1859, p. 789.

⁴⁰ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1859, Volume: V, Appendix 65, p. 481.

⁴¹ For further details see Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 78.

and its neighbourhood. William Howard Russell too had noted in his diary that the Baiswara district in Awadh furnished about 40,000 of the finest of sepoy to the Bengal army.⁴² Also, the fact that out of the 279 Non-Commissioned Officers and sepoy of the 22nd Native Infantry, who deserted in 1824 while on their march from Lucknow, 263 (about 94%) came from Awadh, gives us a clear indication of the vast majority of the recruits that came from that region.⁴³ Viewed in this context it is therefore not surprising that Awadh and its countryside became one of the central bases of rebel sepoy during the conflagration of 1857.

Apart from the Awadh countryside, permanent recruitment centres were established in Budgepur, Patna, Buxar in Bihar, and Jaunpur and Ghazipur in Benares. Pratapgarh and Azamgarh in the Rajput zamindaries of eastern Awadh were also developed as important recruitment centres.⁴⁴ Recruits in large numbers were also raised from the districts of Dinajepur, and also from the Shahabad and Bhagalpur regions.⁴⁵ Kolff has also highlighted the importance of the Bhojpur region, which included the districts of eastern Awadh, Shahabad, Champaran and Saran districts of northern Bihar as a major catchment area in the recruiting of the Company's army.⁴⁶ Interestingly all these recruits were from outside the lower province of Bengal and were high caste Hindu peasants, mostly the Rajputs, who were the traditional warrior caste of North and North-West India, or *Bhumihars*, the military wing of the priestly caste of Brahmins, or Brahmins themselves. This

⁴² William Howard Sir Russell and Michael Edwardes, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, London: Cassell, 1957, p. 227.

⁴³ Bengal Military Consultations, P/31/10, Number 33 dated 6 January 1825, OIOC.

⁴⁴ Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*: p. 41.

⁴⁵ Francis Buchanan, *An Account of the Districts of Bihar and Patna in 1811-1812*, vol. 2, Patna: Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1936, p. 268.

⁴⁶ Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy*: p. 160.

reliance on high caste recruits was partly because of the fact that they were the most physically imposing, and partly because the Company assumed that these 'traditional high caste warriors' would prove to be the most loyal. The high caste overtones of the army suited the interests of the Company probably because it also provided the requisite legitimacy to the Company rule since they were also planning to put up various civil and military institutions across north India. Furthermore, this reliance on the high-caste recruits from the rural areas, and the great care taken by the Company not to compromise the caste principles, made the military service attractive in the eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bhojpur and also in the Awadh-Benaras region. According to the memoir of Durgadas Bandopadhyay the sepoys even carried their own cooking pots and every individual cooked food for themselves in a place that was washed with fresh cow-dung.⁴⁷ The general diet of the sepoys included 'dal' and 'roti'; while any kind of meat, fish and alcohol were strictly prohibited.⁴⁸ Thus in a sense, as Alavi has pointed out, the Company was promoting 'sanskritization of the military'.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ For further details see: Durgadas Bandopadhyay, *Amar Jivana-Charit (My Autobiography)*, Calcutta: Ananya Publishers, 1924. Bandopadhyay wrote his memoirs at the behest of the editor of the *Bangabasi* magazine. He began writing it around 1889 and an early version appeared in the Bengali periodical *Janmabhoomi*, between 1890 and 1891. For the English translation of the memoir, see: Kaushik Roy, *1857 Uprising: A tale of an Indian Warrior*, London, Anthem Press, 2008 (*Translated from Durgadas Bandopadhyay's Amar Jivan-Charit*). For a more nuanced reading of Durgadas Bandopadhyay's memoir, see: Sabyasachi Dasgupta, "Durgadas and Sitaram: Tales of Loyalty in the Great Indian Uprising", in Gavin Rand and Crispin Bates (eds.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume 4: Military Aspects of the Indian Uprising, London: Sage Publications, 2013, pp. 76-92. The use of cow-dung for washing the place of cooking and eating was considered to be the 'proper' way to maintain purity.

⁴⁸ Memoir of Durgadas Bandopadhyay in Roy, *1857 Uprising*: p. 45.

⁴⁹ Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*: p. 76.

As a consequence therefore, the Company's service became very popular amongst these 'Purbias'. In addition to the protection of their caste status, what appealed to these newly recruited men was the improved rewards and security that the Company offered to its soldiers. Although the difference in terms of pay by the native rulers and the Company was not much, the latter's service offered better conditions. The sepoys in the Company's service enjoyed a regular payment of wages, pension benefits and rations while in the field and at times received extra allowances either in cash or in kind.⁵⁰ Besides, whenever they were sent outside the Bengal Presidency, they could secure a family certificate by which a certain portion of their salary was paid to their family every month. Apart from these advantages the sepoys found the Company's pension benefits novel and attractive, promising him and his family a great deal of security even after he had left the service.⁵¹ And finally, the Company had also instituted a system of honours and rewards for its soldiers for the meritorious services. Medals were awarded to commemorate participation in important battles and to recognise the part played by the sepoys in securing victories.⁵²

This preference towards the high caste recruits by the Company aroused enthusiastic responses from many of the Rajput and Brahmin zamindaries of Awadh, Benares as well as the predominantly Hindu peasant population of Pratapgarh, Rae Bareli, Faizabad and Gorakhpur to enlist themselves as sepoys. Besides Awadh, a large proportion of the sepoys were also raised by the Company from the districts of Bihar. The Company's military service was most popular amongst the zamindars of

⁵⁰ Memoir of Durgadas Bandopadhyay in Roy, *1857 Uprising*: p. 47.

⁵¹ Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*: p. 44.

⁵² Memoir of Durgadas Bandopadhyay in Roy, *1857 Uprising*: p. 48.

north and south Bihar. In north Bihar there was a large concentration of Bhumihar Brahmins, which included, amongst others, the zamindars of Saran and the ‘babus’ of Manjha, Parsa and Khairā. This apart, Darbhanga and Tirhut too had large Bhumihar settlements. It is to be noted in this context that around this time the Bhumihar Brahmins were being denied their high caste status by all the other Brahmins and rural high castes of the region because of their interest towards agriculture.⁵³ Under such a circumstance, the Company’s claim to preserve the high caste customs of its sepoy received admiration from these Bhumihar Brahmins and they began to use the opportunity to emphasize their own status. In addition, the Company through its military commandments and commercial contacts reached out to a wider section of the rural elite and made deals with the powerful zamindars for military recruits. Anand Yang has shown a variety of political and administrative ways in which the colonial state delineated its ‘collaborators’ and established political alliances with the rural magnates of Saran for strengthening its rule in northern India.⁵⁴ As a consequence therefore, the Company received large number of recruits from all of these districts. Contracts were signed between the Company and the zamindars of Saran, the Raja of Bettiah and Raja Chutter Singh of Darbhanga and obtained their clan levies for the Bengal army.⁵⁵

One may pause here briefly in order to bring out a few points from the discussion so far. It is evident that the colonial government administration had a

⁵³ Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, *Bhumihar Brahman Parichay (Introduction to Bhumihar Brahmins)*, Benaras: [S.I.], 1916, p. 12.

⁵⁴ Anand A. Yang, *The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India: Saran District, 1793-1920*, London; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, pp. 70-76.

⁵⁵ To cite one example: Robert Rankine, a Company Surgeon posted in Saran, reported in 1830 that the district of Saran supplied 10,000 recruits. See: Robert Rankine, *Notes on the Medical Topography of the District of Saran*, Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1839, p. 34.

definite preference towards the recruitment of its Bengal army. Most of these recruits came from the 'mutiny countries' as Edward Thompson dubbed them.⁵⁶ The principle areas of recruitment were Bihar, Awadh, Rohilkhand, the Doab, Bhojpur and other wheat producing zones of northern India. The English officials firmly believed the inhabitants of wheat producing zones of northern India to be better built than those of the rice producing zones of eastern India, a belief that fitted into their martial race theory. According to this theory, communities were divided into martial and non-martial races. A martial race was a particular ethnic group from a particular region which produced men who were both loyal and had war-like ethos.⁵⁷ This theory was to take a more well-defined form in notions of social Darwinism, but many of its elements were common in the perspectives of the early-mid nineteenth century. The notions held that acquired characteristics might be thus inherited and a hierarchy of human beings could be constructed on the basis of their superior or inferior qualities.⁵⁸ Since martiality was an inherited trait, it was an aspect of race. Blood was regarded as the substance responsible for the transmission of hereditary features. Also, as Crispin Bates has argued, the emergence of the science of anthropometry from around the middle of the nineteenth century added further grist to the mills of the racial biologists. Measurements of human skulls and noses were undertaken by the colonial anthropologists in order to establish the typology of the

⁵⁶ Edward John Thompson, *The Other Side of the Medal. [Observations on the Indian Mutiny.]*, London: L. & V. Woolf, 1925.

⁵⁷ Kaushik Roy, *1857 Uprising: A Tale of an Indian Warrior (Translated from Durgadas Bandopadhyay's Amar Jivan-Charit)*, Anthem South Asian Studies, London: Anthem Press, 2008, p. 14.

⁵⁸ Peter Robb, "Introduction: South Asia and the Concept of Race," in Peter Robb (ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 1-76: pp. 3-4.

various races.⁵⁹ Following this understanding, the colonial officials thus came to the opinion that while the cold bracing climate of the mountainous region produced well-built muscular hardy warriors, the rice growing inhabitants of the south and the east of India, living in a hot and humid climate, were cowardly races incapable of bearing arms.⁶⁰ Also, as DeWitt C. Ellinwood had opined, in the British view masculinity overlapped with martiality.⁶¹ Since the Rajputs of western India considered themselves as manly and martial, they received appreciation from the British perspective. Masculinity and martiality in both Rajput and British societies emphasised honour, courage, vigour, loyalty and warfare. Subsequently British officials accepted the Rajputs as a martial race, owing mainly to the writings of James Tod and others.⁶² Conversely, available recruits in the lower province of Bengal did not conform to the military standards of the English Company. The inhabitants of Bengal, especially the Bengali babus, were regarded as weak since they lacked strong, robust and healthy constitutions.⁶³ Thomas Babington Macaulay

⁵⁹ Crispin Bates, "Race, Caste and Tribe in Central India: The Early Origins of Indian Anthropometry," in Peter Robb (ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 219-259: p. 225.

⁶⁰ Susan Bayly, "Caste and 'Race' in the Colonial Ethnography of India," in Peter Robb (ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 165-218: p. 174.

⁶¹ DeWitt C. Ellinwood, "Two Masculine Worlds Compared: The Army Cantonment and Jaipur Rajput Male Society in Late Colonial India" in Kaushik Roy ed., *War and Society in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 246-71.

⁶² DeWitt C. Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds: A Rajput Officer in the Indian Army, 1905-21: Based on the Diary of Amar Singh of Jaipur*, Oxford: Hamilton Books, 2005, p. 21.

⁶³ Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta, "The Effeminate and the Masculine: Nationalism and the Concept of Race in Colonial Bengal," in Peter Robb (ed.), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 282-303; Babu: A term of respect attached to a name, applicable mostly to the lower province of Bengal. In Bengal and elsewhere, among Anglo-Indians, it is often used with a slight savour of disparagement, as characterizing a superficially cultivated, but too often effeminate, Bengali. Source: Sir Henry Yule, A. C. Burnell, and William Crooke,

in one of his writings had cited the reasons as to why the recruits from Bengal, and more specifically the Bengalis, were never considered worthy by the Company. He wrote: 'The physical organisation of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movement languid. Courage, independence, veracity are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavourable.'⁶⁴ These physical attributes as the main hindrance of the people of lower Bengal from joining the army had also been time and again pointed out in the autobiography of Durgadas Bandopadhyay, a Bengali clerk who was attached with the Company's native regiments during the 1850s.⁶⁵ The babus' supposedly cowardly response to the tough and manly task of war also formed the core of many jokes which surfaced in different literary genres. To cite one example, Kaliprasanna Sinha made a caricature of the Bengali self-image in one of the meeting held at the Hindu Metropolitan College in May 1857 to condemn the rebellion and express loyalty to the British government. Sinha wrote:

Sniffing danger, the Bengali Babus organised a meeting...to convince the Saheb that although a hundred years have passed, they are still...ill-fated chicken-hearted Bengalis – even after years of hobnobbing with the British and imbibing British education...they have failed to become like the Americans...most of them are so scared of storms that they don't even take a boat ride in the Ganges, in order to urinate in the night, they need to be accompanied by their wives or

Hobson-Jobson: Being a Glossary of Anglo-Indian Colloquial Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms; Etymological, Historical, Geographical, and Discursive, London: John Murray, 1886, p. 32.

⁶⁴ Thomas Babington Macaulay Baron Macaulay, John Leonard Clive, and Thomas Pinney, *Selected Writings; Edited and with an Introduction by John Clive & Thomas Pinney*: Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

⁶⁵ For further details see Memoir of Durgadas Bandopadhyay in Roy, *1857 Uprising*.

servants, their arms are pen-knives, and are even scared of their own shadows...it is not surprising that these people are utterly incompetent for fights and wars.⁶⁶

In order to sum up the present discussion, one may safely draw a few inferences. The section discussed in details the origin and principle areas of recruitment of the Bengal army since the days of its inception. Much of the Company's legitimacy as a state power was in fact derived through the continuation of pre-colonial practices, which included the establishment of an army of high-caste Hindu sepoys, comprising mainly of the Brahmins, Bhumihars and Rajputs. As a result the Company in Bengal tapped in to the military labour market of the north-central Gangetic heartland and used the existing networks of patronage and clan-ties by recruiting peasant regiments directly from the zamindars and landholders of Bihar, Benaras and Awadh. By employing the rhetoric of high-caste status and accommodating high-caste sepoys within the regiments provided the colonial government a loyal base of recruitment by becoming an attractive and legitimate military employer in the Gangetic heartland. In the process of following the pre-colonial modes of recruitment, as we witnessed, the regions around the lower provinces of Bengal was not considered by the Company to be an ideal recruitment

⁶⁶ Arun Nag (ed.), Kaliprasanna Sinha, *Hutum Pyanchar Naksha (The Observant Owl)*, Calcutta: Subarnarekha Publications, 1991 (original publication 1862), p. 133. The translation from the original Bengali text is mine. Kaliprasanna Sinha (1841-1870), a scion of a leading and wealthy family of Calcutta was educated at Hindu College (presently Presidency College/University). Of his many literary achievements, the two most memorable contributions was the translation of Mahabharata in Bengali language, the other being the one mentioned above. For a more detailed reading of Sinha, see Ranajit Guha, "A Colonial City and Its Times," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, no. 3, 2008: 329-51.

ground for its regiments. The incompetency of the people inhabiting this region for the military service was further augmented by the martial race theory of the colonial ideologues.

1.4 CHANGES IN THE RECRUITMENT PATTERN AND ITS CONSEQUENT EFFECT

The high caste Hindus from northern India dominated the composition of the Bengal army, and would supply the majority of the recruits right till the outbreak of the rebellion of 1857, although their overwhelming majority of the early years were under threat. Ironically, during the 1820s, the gravest political and social threat to the Company came from within the army itself, especially from the very high-caste peasant sepoys it had hitherto encouraged in its regiments. The 1820s was in fact a decade of mutinies and desertions, the Barrackpore mutiny of 1824-25 being one of the most prominent manifestations of the sepoys' attempt to shield the high-caste status within the army.⁶⁷ Even the Bengal government observed in 1830 that 'an unusually large number of Brahmins from northern India has of late entered the service, it would be desirable, to follow the proportion which formerly prevailed by giving a decided preference to the Rajputs and to the Mahomedans.'⁶⁸ Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India from 1828 to 1835 (and Commander-in-Chief of Bengal from 1833 to 1835) tried to address this problem by issuing a General Order in 1834, which stated that 'all objections to men belonging to the respectable classes of native community, or preferences among such classes on account of caste

⁶⁷ For further detail on the Barrackpore mutiny in 1824 see: Premansukumar Bandyopadhyay, *Tulsi Leaves and the Ganges Water: The Slogan of the First Sepoy Mutiny at Barrackpore, 1824*, Kolkata: K.P. Bagchi, 2003.

⁶⁸ Bengal Military Consultations Number 1600 of 9 August 1830, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

and religion, shall cease to operate in respect to their admission into the ranks of the Bengal Army.’⁶⁹ Ten years later in 1844 Henry Lawrence had shown his apprehension in an article entitled ‘Military Defence and our Indian Empire’ whereby he declared his belief that the British deceived themselves if they thought that their government was ‘maintained otherwise than by the sword’ and that the greatest threat to the British rule ‘is from our own troops’ for which the recruitment policy of the Bengal army was partly to blame. He wrote:

Our sepoys come too much from the same parts of the country, Oude, the lower Dooab, and upper Behar. There is too much of clanship among them, and the evil should be remedied by enlisting in the Saharunpoor and Delhi districts, in the hill regions, and the Malay and Burmah States... We would go further, and would encourage the now despised Eurasians to enter our ranks, either into sepoys’ corps where one or two here and there would be useful or as detached companies or corps...⁷⁰

Subsequently, Lawrence came out with an alternative plan that he thought, if implemented, would be best for the future of the Company’s army:

Oude should no longer supply the mass of our infantry and regular cavalry; indeed, twenty years hence, it will be unable to do so. The Punjab, Nepaul, and the Delhi territory should be more largely indented on; as should the whole North-West Provinces, and the military classes of Bombay and Madras... The plan to be followed, to get and to keep the best soldiers throughout India, and to quietly oppose class against

⁶⁹ General Order of the Governor General dated 31 December 1834, Abstract of General Orders from 1817 to 1840, Number: L/MIL/17/2/435, OIOC. Also see: Acts of the Government of India from 1834 to 1838 Inclusive, Presented in Pursuance of Act 3 and 4, House of Commons, 19 March 1840, BLOC.

⁷⁰ Sir Henry Montgomery Lawrence, *Essays, Military and Political Written in India*, London: W.H. Allen, 1859, pp. 29-30.

class, and tribe against tribe, is to have separate regiments of each creed or class, filling up half, three-fourths, or even more of the commissioned and non-commissioned ranks from their own numbers ... We have not a doubt that, thus organized, the low-caste man, who, under present influences, is the mere creature of the Brahmin, would as readily meet him with the bayonet, as he would a Mahommedan.⁷¹

Lawrence's early apprehensions were initially not considered serious enough by the authorities. But the two Sikh wars of the 1840s forced the Company to rethink its recruitment policy. After the successful conclusion of the first Sikh war (1845-46), two local regiments of Sikh infantry – the Ferozepore and Ludhiana – were raised followed by four more regiments of Sikh Infantry during the year 1846-47. The necessity for such an alternate source of recruits became noticeably visible during the years 1849-50 when a number of sepoys of the Bengal Native Infantry reacted against the news that the foreign-service *batta* would no longer be applicable in Punjab since it has become a British territory.⁷² As a consequence, Sir Charles Napier, the Commander-in-Chief, following the similar recommendation made by Henry Lawrence, decided to recruit more number of the hill-men, especially the

⁷¹ Lawrence, *Essays, Military and Political*: pp. 421-425.

⁷² 'Batta,' an extra allowance made to officers, soldiers, or other public servants, when in the field, or on other special grounds. 'Military *batta*', originally an occasional allowance, as defined, grew to be a constant addition to the pay of officers in India, and constituted the chief part of the excess of Indian over English military emoluments. The question of the right to *batta* on several occasions created great agitation among the officers of the Indian army, and the measure of economy carried out by Lord William Bentinck, when Governor-General (General Order. of the Governor. General. in Council, 29 November 1828) in the reduction of full *batta* to half *batta*, in the allowances received by all regimental officers serving at stations within a certain distance of the Presidency in Bengal (viz.. Barrackpore, Dumdum, Berhampore, and Dinapore), caused an enduring bitterness against that upright ruler. Yule, Burnell, and Crooke, *Hobson-Jobson: Being a Glossary of Anglo-Indian Colloquial Words and Phrases*: pp. 54-55.

Gurkhas, into the army.⁷³ Already around that time there were three irregular Gurkha battalions, raised in the wake of the Nepal war of 1814-15.⁷⁴ According to Napier, they were the 'bravest of Native troops' and 'at the battles on the Sutledge (river Sutlej in the 1st Sikh War) displayed such conspicuous gallantry as to place them for courage on a level with our Europeans.'⁷⁵ This move was formally sanctioned by the issue of a General order by the Governor-General in March 1850.⁷⁶ In the course of the rebellion of 1857 these new recruits, along with the Scottish Highlanders, would eventually prove to be decisive in determining the outcome for the British government.⁷⁷

The high-caste composition of the Bengal army received a further blow in the summer of 1856 when the new Governor-general, Lord Canning, ordered that all the enlistment to the Indian Army would henceforth be for general service.⁷⁸ This move was a significant departure from the initial methods adopted by the Company. Hitherto it had been the practice in Bengal to ask for volunteers when troops were needed for overseas service. But under the regulation introduced by Canning, all the new recruits would be taken on the basis of general enlistment. To the high-caste sepoys, this new regulation was highly deplorable since they thought this would discourage their brethren from enlisting thereby undermining their monopoly and unity within the regiments. Hidayat Ali, an officer of the Sikh Police Battalion, later

⁷³ Charles James Napier and William Francis Patrick Napier, *Defects, Civil and Military, of the Indian Government*, 2nd ed., London: C. Westerton, 1853, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Military Consultations Number: 34 and 35 dated 19 March 1819, Government of India, OIOC.

⁷⁵ Napier, *Defects, Civil and Military*: p. 28.

⁷⁶ General Order of Governor General dated 22 March 1850, Abstract of General Orders from 1848 to 1853, Number: L/MIL/17/2/437, OIOC.

⁷⁷ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity*: p. 52.

⁷⁸ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Vol.: V, 1859, Appendix: 14, p. 376, BLOC.

recalled that ‘any new order issued by the Government is looked upon with much suspicion by the Native Army, and is much canvassed in every regiment’.⁷⁹ Stokes had suggested, ‘this unity of action could be seriously affected by any dilution of the high-caste element’ and this might have been the reason ‘why Mangal Pandey was not supported by his comrades when he sought to raise the 34th regiment at Barrackpore on 29 March 1857.’⁸⁰ Thus, to Stokes, one of the major causes of the mutiny of 1857 was the determination by the high-caste Bengal sepoys to retain their stranglehold over the recruitment. As he argued, ‘the closed shop of the Purbias (easterners) of the middle Ganges was under obvious threat, and with it all those privileges of home service and a certain independent negotiating power characteristic of mercenary armies. Hence, solid material fears underlay the apprehension over any infringement of caste rules by British authority’.

TABLE 1
Ethnic Composition of a New Battalion of Bengal Native Infantry in 1815⁸¹

Brahmins	Rajputs	Hindus of Inferior Castes	Muslims	Total
392 (43.9%)	304 (34.1%)	108 (12.1%)	92 (10.3%)	892

⁷⁹ “A few words relative to the late Mutiny of the Bengal Army, and the Rebellion in the Bengal Presidency, by Shaik Hedayut Ali, Subadar and Sirdar Bahadoor, Bengal Seikh Police Battalion, commanded by Captain T. Rattray, who has translated this paper from the original Oordoo”, Judicial Proceedings Number 14, 30 September 1858, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁸⁰ Eric Stokes and C. A. Bayly, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 52.

⁸¹ Barat, *The Bengal Native Infantry*: p. 122.

TABLE 2
Ethnic Composition of the Bengal Native Infantry in 1842⁸²

Rajputs	Brahmins	Hindus of Inferior Caste	Muslims	Christians	Total
27,993 (34.9%)	24,840 (31.0%)	13,920 (17.3%)	12,411 (15.4%)	1,076 (1.3%)	80,240

TABLE 3
Ethnic Composition of the 34th Bengal Native Infantry on 21 April 1857⁸³

Brahmins	Rajputs	Hindus Of Inferior Caste	Muslims	Sikhs	Christians	Total
335 (30.8%)	237 (21.8%)	231 (21.2%)	237 (21.8%)	74 (6.8%)	12 (1.1%)	1,089

From the tables above, it is evident that the Hindu high-caste orientation of the Bengal army had definitely changed by 1857, although they still had the numerical majority. This obviously had an adverse effect on the hitherto monopoly of the recruits. As Kim Wagner noted, by 1850s the relationship between the sepoys and the British officers was characterised by increasing distance and growing resentment.⁸⁴ Loss of high-caste status within the army, fear of religious conversion, grievances over inadequate pay, the removal of privileges, lack of opportunity for promotion, and a corps of British officers with a poor understanding of the native culture did nothing to improve the sepoy's loyalty to the Company. The final blow to the already exasperated situation, in addition to the General Service Enlistment Order, was the annexation of Awadh in 1856 that had a significant impact on the

⁸² Barat, *The Bengal Native Infantry*: p. 123.

⁸³ George W. Forrest, *Selections from the Letters, Despatches and Other State Papers Preserved in the Military Department of the Government of India : 1857-58*, Vol. 1, Calcutta: Military Dept. Press, 1902, p. 177.

⁸⁴ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: p. 41.

sepoys of the Bengal army.⁸⁵ On the pretext of alleged despotic misrule, the Nawab of Awadh was summarily deposed in 1856 that caused immense disruption. In his place the Company placed a British chief commissioner who by introducing new laws concerning the ownership of land dispossessed many influential zamindars and taluqdars who previously had held leading positions in the society. Moreover, the transfer of Awadh to Company rule also caused extreme hardship on the bulk of the population through serious over-assessments of property for tax purposes in many districts, through unemployment and dislocations caused by the removal of the Nawab of Awadh's court, and through a rise in prices of essential commodities.⁸⁶ From the sepoys perspective the state they were serving had taken over their home region, by what they perceived as a deceitful and treacherous means. According to Moinodin Hasan Khan, a native police officer well acquainted with the sepoys, 'Oude was the birthplace of the Purbeah race and these feelings of dissatisfaction affected the whole Purbeah race in the service of the British Government. To the native mind the act of annexation was one of gross injustice, and provoked a universal desire for resistance'.⁸⁷

1.5 CONCLUSION

In order to sum up the main points discussed in the present chapter, one may safely draw a few inferences that were significant in shaping the nature and character of the

⁸⁵ Colonel Keith Young, Papers Connected with the Reorganisation of the Army in India, House of Commons Parliamentary papers, 1859, Session 2, p. 142, BLOC.

⁸⁶ For further details see Chapter 2 "Annexation and the Summary Settlement of 1856-7" in Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: pp. 32-63.

⁸⁷ Moinodin Hasan Khan, in Charles Theophilus Metcalfe (trans.), *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, Westminster: A. Constable and Co., 1898, p. 37.

rebellion of 1857. As the chapter argued, in the entire conflagration of 1857, it was the mutinies of the Bengal army that dictated the initial course of action. It was only after the rebellion of sepoys in the cantonments had met with initial success that the character of the movement transformed into a wider phenomenon, involving civil population. But the fact that the transformation of the mutiny of sepoys in the cantonments to a broader civil uprising was mainly limited within the north-central Gangetic heartland can be explained in terms of socio-cultural ties, composition and recruitment pattern of the Bengal army. It is evident from the present discussion that the principal areas of recruitment of the Bengal army, right from its inception had been from the various districts of Awadh, Bihar, Rohilkhand, and the Doab. It seems reasonable to infer that the Company - whether deliberately or out of lack of choice – preferred to tap in the existing military labour market, maintaining the existing high caste orientation of the recruitment in the army. The reliance on the existing pattern of recruitment of high-caste Hindu peasants from the wheat producing zones of northern and central India conversely meant that the regions lying in the lower province of the Bengal presidency were not considered to be an ‘ideal’ recruitment ground for the Company army. This idea was furthered augmented by the idea of masculinity and martial race theory of the Company ideologues, which categorised the inhabitants of the lower province of the Bengal presidency as weak, feeble and ‘effeminate’ and thus incompetent for the army service. From around 1830s onwards the Company, finding it alarming to have such a homogenous army composition, introduced certain changes in the recruitment pattern of the army, and began to look to the areas beyond the Gangetic heartland. Curiously, though the Company extended its geographical parametres for the army recruitment quite far and wide, incorporating among others, a few battalions of Sikh regiments after the Anglo-Sikh

wars in the 1840s, the logic behind the absence of sepoy recruitment from the lower province of Bengal presidency remained very much the same.

On the other hand, while bringing in the changes in recruitment pattern of its army, the Company could no longer defend its non-intervention policy or the need to perpetuate pre-colonial practices and customs. The passing of the General Order of 1834 allowed for the recruitment of a wider range of Hindu and Muslim groups, thereby breaking the high-caste monopoly of the army and undermining the very identity and ritual purity of the sepoys. Wagner has argued that the Hindu sepoys of the Bengal army were not simply high-caste – *being* in that army was to a large extent what *made* them high-caste.⁸⁸ The subsequent changes brought in by the Colonial government – the most significant being the General Service Enlistment and the annexation of Awadh in 1856 – convinced the sepoys that the state they had loyally served had turned their back against them. A deep sense of resentment that had been brewing amongst the sepoys finally sparked off, as the rumour of the greased cartridge began to take hold in the early months of 1857. But with regards to the provinces in lower Bengal, the sepoys – having no formal socio-cultural ties with the region or the people – after the open outbreak of mutinies in various cantonments attempted to get back to their own districts in the Gangetic heartland, from where they were recruited, carrying with them the messages of the rebellion. As a consequence, the rebellion in the region under study remained confined mostly to the cantonment areas. However, as we move on to subsequent chapters, it will be evident that the rebellion in the lower province of Bengal, with its differential nature and

⁸⁸ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: p. 44.

character, produced certain moments of crises having a much wider impact in the region.

CHAPTER TWO

RUMOUR, PANIC AND 'THE GREAT FEAR' OF CALCUTTA 1857-58

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The last chapter looked at the origin, composition and the recruitment pattern of the Bengal army and the socio-economic changes that were brought in the process. We also had a brief survey of the grievances of the sepoys that originated out of the process of recruitment. The chapter also brought out the context within which the rebellion needs to be analysed. The present chapter addresses one of the prevailing assumptions in the existing literature on the rebellion of 1857 in the lower province of the Bengal Presidency. Contrary to received wisdom, this chapter shows that the capital of the British East India Company, and the regions in and around Calcutta, were far from quiet and at peace during this period of crisis. The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Fredrick J. Halliday, in one of his later reports dated 30 September 1858, had admitted that there was hardly a district in the neighbourhood of Calcutta, including the Presidency itself, which had escaped either actual danger or the serious apprehension of danger.¹ However, as we will see in the course of this chapter, it was not just the events of different multitude occurring in and around Calcutta that were the causes of concern for the government and the residents both in and around the city. Rather it was the cumulative effect of the rumours and panic that

¹ Frederick James Halliday, "The Mutinies as they affected the Lower Provinces under the Government of Bengal, 1858" in C. E. Buckland, *Bengal under the Lieutenant-Governors: Being a Narrative of the Principal Events and Public Measures During Their Periods of Office, from 1854 to 1898*, 2 vols., Calcutta: S. K. Lahiri & Co., 1901, p. 68.

accompanied these events that had put the colonial government and the European population of the city in a state of shock and anxiety for several months.

As outlined in the methodology section of the introduction, I argue in this chapter that rumour played a significant role in the circulation of information in and around the city of Calcutta during this period of unrest.² A study of rumour and its consequent effect during a moment of social and political upheaval, such as the rebellion of 1857, has the potential to reveal much about peoples' perceptions than the official reports allows us to. As the chapter gradually unfolds, it will be clear, in the words of Kim Wagner that the accuracy of the rumours was not always the most essential component, and whether or not they were true, they had some real consequences.³ This chapter is a study of the colonial paranoia during the rebellion of 1857 in Bengal, and also the fear of the civil population residing in the city of Calcutta and its vicinity. It seeks to reconstruct the narrative of events during this period of crisis in a region that has hitherto been uncharted as well as attempts to look at a moment of crisis to study the popular perceptions in the lower province of Bengal of the time. The central point of this chapter will be to analyse the cumulative effects of actual events that were unfolding in the north-central Gangetic heartland of India during the rebellion of 1857 and the unverified rumours that were coming along with these reports in the seat of the British Empire, i.e., Calcutta, and its immediate vicinities. The purpose will be to study the role of the rumours as a historical tool of analysis and to situate the rumours that were unfolding in and

² Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, trans. Joan White, London: New Left Books, 1973.

³ Kim A. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010, p. 23.

around Calcutta within the broader conflagration of the rebellion of 1857. In doing so, the chapter will look at the response and reactions of the European officials and civilians as well as the indigenous population of the city with regards to the resultant panic. It also examines the role of the actors, especially the colonial government, in response to the crisis they had to face and the various measures that they had to undertake in order to overcome the crisis at the heart of their Empire. In a broader perspective, the underlining purpose of this chapter is to highlight the fact that the rebellion of 1857, with all its regional specificities, was a networked event, the ramification of which was far and wide with varying consequences. As a corollary to the argument, the chapter has also made an attempt to draw a parallel to the situation in the Straits Settlements, arguing that the impact of the cumulative effect of rumour and panic that accompanied the rebellion was not confined to the seat of the British empire but had its impact that transcended the regional/national boundaries.

2.2 THE GATHERING STORM

The purpose of this section is to study the chronology of the events in a narrative sequence in order to analyse how the rebellion had been sparked off by the prevailing rumours in Dumdum, Berhampore and Barrackpore, the three most important military cantonments situated around the city of Calcutta. The following section also looks at the initial vacillation on the part of the colonial government regarding the authenticity and importance of the rumours that were floating across and the kind of measures they should take in order to bring down the excitements and apprehensions from the mind of the native sepoys. In other words, this section sets the scene of the

prevailing situation in and around the city of Calcutta on the eve of the outbreak of the actual rebellion that followed soon after the open act of rebellion by Mangal Pandey, a sepoy belonging to the 34th regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry in the military cantonment of Barrackpore. This section will attempt to dispel the notion that the mutiny of Mangal Pandey was not an isolated act of individual bravado but was a direct outcome of a series of events in and around Calcutta that preceded the formal outbreak of the rebellion. The uprising, as Wagner noted, did not simply erupt or spread like a wildfire; it was smouldering for months and only gradually got under way in the most faltering manner.⁴

The earliest signs of disquiet among the sepoys were evident in Dumdum in January 1857. Dumdum had earlier been the headquarters of the Bengal Artillery. When this headquarters was shifted to Meerut, Dumdum had to be satisfied with a School of Musketry designed to impart training of the newly-introduced Enfield Rifle. In January, the cantonment at Dumdum was agog with all sorts of rumours about the 'nefarious designs' of the government.⁵ Major John Bontein, the Commanding Officer of the Depot of Musketry at Dumdum, reported as early as 23 January 1857 about the prevailing rumours and uneasiness in his cantonment to the higher authority.⁶ From Dumdum, rumours reached Barrackpore, the Headquarters of the Presidency Division of the army. In late January Major General John Hearsey,

⁴ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: p. 26.

⁵ For further details see: George W. Forrest, *Selections from the Letters, Despatches and Other State Papers Preserved in the Military Department of the Government of India : 1857-58*, 4 vols., Calcutta: Military Dept. Press, 1902.

⁶ Enclosure 5 in Number 1, Enclosure 6 in Number 1 dated 23 January 1857, Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament by Command of her Majesty, 1857, BLOC; Letter sent from Captain Wright to Major Bontein dated 23 January 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 45, 5 February 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

who was in charge of the Division, noticed a growing 'ill-feeling' in the minds of the sepoys of the regiments at Barrackpore.⁷ Initially Hearsey dismissed these reports as being baseless rumours. However, subsequent reports of occurrences of the burning down of a Sergeant's Bungalow in Ranigunj, about 120 miles from Calcutta, by sepoys belonging to the 2nd Grenadiers, followed by a similar incident within a week in Barrackpore, where the telegraph office and some empty Bungalows were put on fire, convinced Hearsay that these acts were being caused by ill-affected men, who wished to spread a 'spirit of discontent.'⁸ According to an Indian police officer, Moinoddin Hasan Khan, it was furthermore calculated that the burning of a telegraph office would immediately be communicated along the line from Calcutta to Punjab, rapidly spreading the news of the arson attacks to other sepoy regiments stationed across northern India.⁹ John William Kaye, 'the chief historian of the Mutiny' as Eric Stokes called him, wrote that it was a trick learnt by the 2nd Grenadiers from the Santhals, among whom they had served.¹⁰ In fact, this linkage between a distinctly tribal custom and its appropriation by the mutinous sepoys in the cantonment was not a figment of Kaye's imagination. After all, the Santhal uprising had taken place only a couple of years previously and its memory was still fresh in popular mind. More importantly, the British authorities deciphered a kind of pattern, in that the troops

⁷ Enclosure 18 in Number 1, Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament by Command of her Majesty, 1857, BLOC.

⁸ Enclosure 18 in Number 1, Major General J.B. Hearsey to the Deputy Adjutant General of the Army, Barrackpore, 28 January 1857, Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament by Command of her Majesty, 1857, BLOC.

⁹ Cited in Kim A. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: pp. 45-46.

¹⁰ Sir John William Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India 1857-1858*, 3 vols., London: Allen, 1865. John William Kaye (1814-1876) was a British military historian and also an Officer of the Bengal Artillery. He later succeeded John Stuart Mill as the Secretary of the Political and Secret Department of the India office.

from the 2nd Native Infantry were posted at both Raniganj and Barrackpore. Strong guards were accordingly posted in the officer's lines and there were constant patrols, while the thatched roofs of verandas were removed to avoid the risk of further arson attacks.¹¹

Accordingly, this regiment came under the suspicion as the British officers began to speculate that something more serious than mere idle rumours might be brewing.¹² There were also reports of animated discussions among the sepoys, generally held at night. A. Stewart Allen, Lieutenant of the 34th Native Infantry, was informed by one of his messenger about an elaborate plot which was being hatched by men of the different regiments in the cantonment at Barrackpore.¹³ According to the information provided by the messenger, the sepoys of various regiments of the station in Barrackpore were feeling apprehensive that they would be forced to give up their caste and be made Christians. As a consequence, in order to prevent this from happening, the sepoys were determined 'to rise up against their officers, and commence by either plundering or burning down the bungalows at Barrackpore; they next proposed to proceed to Calcutta and attempt to seize the Fort William, or, failing that, to take possession of the treasury.'¹⁴ Furthermore, the messenger also informed Allen that the delegates from various other regiments were to assemble on

¹¹ Letter from Major General Hearsay to Military Secretary Colonel Birch dated 5 February 1857, Judicial Department Proceedings Number 31, 24 March 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹² Hearsay to Sanders dated 11 February 1857, Judicial Proceedings 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹³ Statement of A. Stewart Allen, Lieutenant 34th Regiment Bengal Native Infantry, 8 February 1857, Enclosure 14 in Number 3 Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies; Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1857, BLOC.

¹⁴ Statement of A. Stewart Allen, Lieutenant 34th Regiment Bengal Native Infantry, 8 February 1857, Enclosure 14 in Number 3 Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies; Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1857, BLOC.

the evening of 6 February 1857 in order to discuss their future course of action. Part of the plan consisted in mobilising sepoys outside of Barrackpore, where ‘the men of other regiments were to be informed of what is going on here, and that they are to be called upon to cooperate with their comrades, the affair being one which concerned them all equally’.¹⁵ These delegates were being informed by some sources of the arrival of a European regiment near Dinapur along with artilleries in order to prevent the outbreak of any disturbances. Thus they deemed it necessary to take immediate action before it was too late. The subsequent burning down of the electric telegraph office in early February was, according to the informant, part of a ‘concerted plan to prevent the government receiving speedy information of what was going on. It also becomes evident from the aforesaid information provided by Allen’s messenger that even before the first fire of the mutiny was shot, the rebels had thought of a concerted course of action to oust the government. As it happened, no outbreak took place in Barrackpore, and the sepoys’ plan came to nothing.’¹⁶ It was significant however that large numbers of sepoys from all four regiments at the station took part in the plotting, and that they intended to contact other regiments. This was not the only time the sepoys at Barrackpore met at night. From the deposition of Jemadar Durriow there appear to have been several such occasions, during which men met in the lines after dark, with their face covered, to discuss the course of actions.¹⁷

¹⁵ Statement of A. Stewart Allen, Lieutenant 34th Regiment Bengal Native Infantry, 8 February 1857, Enclosure 14 in Number 3 Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies; Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1857, BLOC.

¹⁶ Letter sent from C. Grant, Commanding at Barrackpore to Major Ross, Assistant Adjutant-General Presidency Division dated 8 February 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 36, 22 February 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁷ Deposition of Jemadar Durriow of 34th Regiment Native Infantry dated 10 February 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 62, 22 February 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

To make things further disturbing for the government, at about this time the so-called 'Lota incident' happened.¹⁸ Captain Wright of the 70th Native Infantry informed the details of this incident to Major Bontein, commanding the depot of musketry at Dumdum. We may not need to go into the details. Suffice it to say that when a person possibly belonging to a low-caste community wanted to drink from the 'lota' of a sepoy belonging to the 2nd Grenadiers, the latter refused since he was not aware of the former's caste. To this the low-caste person immediately responded that the sepoys should not be bothered anymore about losing their caste status since they would all soon be converted to Christianity.¹⁹ Rumours of this kind were already in circulation in the military cantonments and added to the suspicions in the minds of the sepoys. The extent of the sepoys' fear and apprehension is best reflected in one of the anonymous petition addressed to Major Matthews of the 43rd Bengal native infantry in Barrackpore: '...we will not give up our religion. We serve for honour and religion; if we loose our religion, the Hindoo and Mahomeddan religion will be destroyed'.²⁰ In the petition all the different rumours that had troubled the sepoys for months came together and gave form and substance to the idea of a colonial conspiracy to ruin the religion of all Indians. The petition further stated that

¹⁸ 'Lota', the small spheroidal brass pot which Hindus used for drinking, and sometimes for cooking. This is the exclusive Anglo-Indian application, but natives also extend it to spherical pipkins of earthenware. Sir Henry Yule, A. C. Burnell, and William Crooke, *Hobson-Jobson: Being a Glossary of Anglo-Indian Colloquial Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms; Etymological, Historical, Geographical, and Discursive*, London: John Murray, 1886.

¹⁹ Letter sent from Captain Wright to Major Bontein dated 22 February 1857, Judicial Department Proceedings Number 28, 12 March 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

²⁰ Letter sent from Major Matthews to Major-General Hearsey dated 16 March 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 32, 23 April 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA. Also quoted in Kim A. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising*, Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. 80-81.

it was evident the British council had decided to distribute greased cartridges to the sepoys in order to destroy their caste.

Major-General Hearsey commanding at Dumdum on hearing these reports from his subordinates realised the potential danger that the government were about to face. He connected the floating rumours with the nightly acts of incendiarism that had already begun to take place in various quarters.²¹ Apart from the strengthened guards patrolling the cantonment, a reward was also offered for any information on the arson attacks. In addition, camp-followers were now being registered to keep 'bad characters' out of the cantonment.²² Hearsey wrote, 'it will be hard, most difficult to eradicate this impression from the minds of the native soldiers, who are always suspiciously disposed when any change of this sort affecting themselves is introduced.'²³ In February 1857 Hearsey reported to the Secretary to the Government of India that the English at Barrackpore had been 'dwelling upon a mine ready for explosion' and unless this was immediately responded with great caution, he was afraid that Sir Charles Metcalfe's apprehension about waking up in one fine morning to find India had been lost to the English Crown might indeed come true.²⁴

²¹ Henry Mead, *The Sepoy Revolt: Its Causes and Its Consequences*, London: John Murray, 1857, p. 48.

²² Letter sent from Major General Hearsay to Mayhew deputy Adjutant-General of the Army dated 8 February 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 16, 18 February 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

²³ Letter sent from Major General Hearsay to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 26 February 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 48, 14 March 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

²⁴ Major General Hearsey to the Secretary to the Government of India, Barrackpore, February 11, 1857, Enclosure 20 in Number 3, Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1857, BLOC.

What was still a suspicion at Barrackpore, turned into a belief at Berhampur, approximately two hundred kilometres north of Calcutta. The association of Berhampur with the revolt of 1857 has been consigned to collective oblivion as a result of the more active theatres of action in the Gangetic heartland. In a way this is unfortunate since Berhampur was the site of the first recorded instance of the mutiny of the sepoys in 1857 that was to destroy the hitherto trusted army of Bengal. To this military station was posted a regiment of the 19th Native Infantry and a corps of Irregular Cavalry.²⁵ From early February there were reports of disquiet among the sepoys. These revolved round the rumour about the new cartridges and their apprehended impact on their caste. Initially the authorities did not take the discontent seriously. They expected, perhaps not without reason, that given some time, these would die down. This time, however, their precocious expectations vanished like sunset glow. Colonel Mitchell, who was in charge of Berhampur, was informed about excitement in the Lines on 27 February 1857.²⁶ His intemperate handling of the situation and reported threat to send the errant sepoys to Burma exacerbated an already volatile situation resulting in the mutiny of the 19th regiment. The sepoys broke open the storeroom where the weapons were kept and loaded their muskets, refusing initially to surrender them.²⁷ The situation was partially diffused by the intervention of their Indian officers. According to the Havildar-Major of the 19th regiment, 'there was already a rumour that the cavalry were about to seize the kotes'

²⁵ Letter sent from Colonel Mitchell to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 9 February 1857, Secret and Political Consultations Number 58, 26 February 1857, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

²⁶ Letter sent from Sergeant-Major Frawley to Colonel Mitchell dated 27 February 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 46, 12 March 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

²⁷ Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *The Great Uprising in India, 1857-58: Untold Stories, Indian and British*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007, p. 30.

and thus the sepoy's armed themselves before they were being disarmed. Kim Wagner mentioned about a petition that was later written by the sepoy's in Berhampur which brings into light the general state of panic that was prevailing amongst the sepoy's in Berhampur:

The same night...shouts of various kinds were heard; some said there is a fire; others that they were surrounded by the Europeans; some said that the guns had arrived; others that the cavalry had appeared. In the midst of this row the alarm sounded on a drum, then from fear of our lives the greater number seized their arms from kotes...11th regiment, Irregular Cavalry, and the guns with torches arrived on the parade with the commanding officer, which still more confirmed our suspicions of the cartridges being greased, inasmuch as the commanding officer appeared to be about to carry his threats into execution by force. We had been hearing of this sort of thing for the last two months or more, and here appeared to be the realisation of it.²⁸

Two things about Berhampur made the administration particularly anxious. One was its proximity to Murshidabad, the residence of the Nawab Nazim whose support, it was apprehended, could turn the scale in favour of the rebels. J.W. Kaye wrote 'It was not difficult to see that if these troops were to rise against their English officers, and the people of Moorshedabad were to fraternise with them, in the name

²⁸ Translation of the petition from the native commissioned and non-commissioned officers and sepoy's of the 19th regiment, Native Infantry, to Major-General J.B. Hearsay, C.B., commanding the Presidency Division, Letter sent from Colonel Mitchell to Major A.H. Ross Assistant Adjutant-General Barrackpur, dated 2 March 1857, in Forrest, *Selections from the Letters*: Vol. 1, p. 46., quoted in Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: pp. 57-58.

of the Newab, all Bengal would soon be in a blaze.’²⁹ The other cause was the absence of any European troops in the town or in its vicinity. To make matters worse for the administration, routine movement of a detachment of the 34th Native Infantry from Barrackpore to Berhampur in February enabled the disquiet shared by sepoys in the former to be transmitted to the latter. The mutiny at Berhampur was brought under control, and it was decided that it had to be punished. According to the order read out to the rebellious sepoys on the day of the punishment, ‘the men of this Regiment had refused obedience to their European officers. They had seized arms with violence. They had assembled in a body to resist the authority of their commander. The regiment had been guilty of open and defiant mutiny.’³⁰ The punishment decided upon was to disband the 19th Regiment of the Native Infantry. On 27 March Lord Canning ordered that the 19th regiment be marched to Barrackpore and there disbanded in front of the other native regiments: ‘mutiny so open and defiant cannot be excused by any sensitiveness of religion or caste, by fear of coercion, or by the seduction and deception of others’.³¹

It was easy to take the decision but difficult to implement it. In view of the paucity of European soldiers at Berhampur, disbanding them there was ruled out almost immediately. The solution the authorities had worked upon was to bring the sepoys from Berhampur to Barrackpore without in any way letting them know the

²⁹ Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India 1857-1858*: p. 358.

³⁰ “Minute by the Governor-General of India in Council”, Enclosure 22 in Number 5, Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament, 1857, BLOC.

³¹ “Minute on the Mutiny at Berhampore of the 19th regiment, Native Infantry”, Forwarded correspondence from Colonel R.J.H. Birch, Secretary to the Government of India Military Department, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Proceedings Number 884 dated 27 March 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

purpose of this movement. The regiment arrived at Barrackpore on 31 March.³² In anticipation of its arrival, fresh reinforcement was brought to Barrackpore. H.M.'s 84th was rushed from Burma and a wing of H.M.'s 53rd was brought from Calcutta. A troop of the Madras artillery, on the way to its own Presidency was detained there, while a second troop had been called from Dumdum. The body guard of the Governor General was on the spot and every soldier that was available from the presidency appeared on the parade. These preparations being over, the task was carried out and the punishment of the Berhampur rebels was formally announced:

It is, therefore, the order of the Governor General in Council, that the 19th Regiment N.I. be now disbanded.; that the native commissioned and non-commissioned officers and privates be discharged from the army of Bengal; that this be done at the headquarters of the presidency division in the presence of every available corps within two days' march to the station; that the regiment be paraded for the purpose, and that each man, after being deprived of his arms, shall receive his arrears of pay and be required to withdraw from the cantonment.³³

However, considering the behaviour of the regiment in question, Hearsey allowed them to leave the parade ground in their uniform. In addition, he also allowed them to go to worship at the temples where their forefathers had worshipped, and also to go on a pilgrimage if they wished to. Hearsey thought that by giving them

³² Letter from Major-General J.B. Hearsay to R.J.H. Birch, Secretary to the Government of India in the Military Department, in Forrest, *Selections from the Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 103.

³³ Judicial Proceedings, 27 March 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA; also, General Orders by the Governor-General of India in Council, Enclosure 23 in Number 5, Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament, 1857, BLOC.

this permission he would be negating the report that the government wished to force Christianity on the sepoys. But to others it sounded more like ‘the address of a master discharging his servant with the words “here you rascals are your wages, and now you may go to the Devil if you like.”’³⁴ In other words, it was punishment as a spectacle.

In March, the locus shifted from Berhampur back again to Barrackpore. Hearsey had already noticed that there was adequate tension in the cantonment. What he failed to appreciate was the depth of the grievances. Hence, he took recourse to the conspiracy theory, which eventually turned into a shibboleth of colonial analyses of popular movements in India. Hearsey ascribed the restiveness in the sepoy lines to some ‘designing scoundrels’, such as ‘the Dharma Sabha people in Calcutta, who poisoned the minds of the gullible sepoys.’³⁵ To him, these ‘agents of the religious Hindoo Party of Calcutta’ who were opposed to the remarriage of widows were using under-hand means to thwart the government by trying to persuade the ignorant sepoys that their religion were soon to be abolished by force and all of them would soon be converted to Christians.³⁶ It is this optical illusion that saw nothing beyond blind religious fury,³⁷ which blinded Hearsey and his folk from the ground level realities and that then took them somewhat by surprise on 29 March, 1857. The story

³⁴ *The Dacca News*, 11 April 1857, Vol. II, Number 51, p. 120.

³⁵ Judicial Proceedings Number 322, 23 April 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

³⁶ Major General Hearsey to the Deputy Adjutant-General of the Army, 28 January 1857, Enclosure 18 in Number 1, Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament, 1857, BLOC.

³⁷ Presidency Division Orders by Major-General J.B. Hearsay commanding the Presidency Division dated 5 April 1857, in Forrest, *Selections from the Letters*, vol. 1: p. 106. In the correspondence Major-General congratulated Lieutenant and Adjutant B.H. Baugh and Sergenat-Major J.T. Hewson for the personal gallantry displayed by them during the conflict with the sepoy Mangal Pandey, who ‘in a state of religious frenzy’, endeavoured to raise a mutiny in that regiment.

of Mangal Pandey's defiance has been retold so many times and in so many different versions that it might well form the subject matter of a separate historiographical exercise.³⁸ Suffice it to say that sepoy Mangal Pandey belonged to the 34th regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry. On 29 March 1857, Pandey refused to comply with the orders of his authorities, seized his musket and rushed upon the parade ground in Barrackpore, calling upon his comrades to come forward and join him in the fight for their religion.³⁹ When the Sergeant-Major came forward to disarm him, Pandey shot at him but missed. It was only with the timely intervention of Major-General Hearsey that the situation was brought under control. But although Pandey's call was not readily responded to by very many of his comrades, and his act of defiance was put down by Hearsey without much bloodshed, it was provocative enough to send the administration scurrying for cover. The first thing that the government did was to execute Pandey after a court martial and to disband the seven companies of the Thirty-fourth stationed at Barrackpore.⁴⁰

It is thus evident from the above discussion that even before the first gunfire of the rebellion was shot, rumours and unverified reports of various kinds related to the greased cartridges and the fear of forceful religious conversion of the sepoys played a crucial role in the unfolding of subsequent events, and eventually provided the spark that led to the open act of rebellion by sepoy Mangal Pandey. Although the colonial

³⁸ The details of the proceedings of the trial of Mangal Pandey are available in Forrest, *Selections from the Letters*.; For further details on this see Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Mangal Pandey: Brave Martyr or Accidental Hero?*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2005; Amaresh Misra, *Mangal Pandey, the True Story of an Indian Revolutionary*, New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2005. Also see Chapter 4 "Mangal Pandey" in Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: pp. 79-97.

³⁹ Letter sent from the Hearsay to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 30 March 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 348, 2 April 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁴⁰ Judicial Proceedings Number 356, 2 April 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

government was warned of the circulation of the rumours and their possible repercussions among the sepoys of the Bengal Native Infantry by some of their own officers, the colonial government failed to estimate the authenticity and significance of these rumours. By the time the authorities realised the gravity of the situation, it was too late for them.

2.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITUATION

While the preceding section highlighted the situation that was prevailing in and around the city of Calcutta on the eve of the actual outbreak of the rebellion, the present section moves a step further and looks at the events and actors that were involved in the rebellion once it had commenced with the mutinous act of Mangal Pandey. The section situates the events that were unfolding in the various parts of the Gangetic heartland and the various unverified sources of rumour that were coming along with them down to the seat of the colonial government, and connect them with the various incidents in Calcutta that made the government as well as the civil population seriously concerned of the situation. It also examines how in a specific moment of crisis the rumours, followed by the incidents of panics, which would otherwise have made not much of an impact, created an atmosphere of paranoia in Calcutta. It shows how the colonial government as well as the civil population of the city saw these developments as an imminent threat to the continuation of colonial rule in India and analyses the various precautionary measures adopted by the government.

As mentioned in the previous section, the 19th regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry were brought from Berhampur to Barrackpore and were disbanded and

dismissed on 31 March.⁴¹ The disbandment of the seven companies of 34th Native Infantry, stationed in Barrackpore, was implemented on 6 May 1857.⁴² Lest these drastic steps affect the morale of other cantonments in Bengal, the government issued a proclamation on 16 May 1857 disavowing any intention to tamper with the observances of religion and caste of the sepoys and advising them to shun company of 'false guides and traitors'.⁴³ Quite clearly the conspiracy theory was at work and outside agencies were held responsible for tampering with the 'habitual loyalty and orderly conduct of the sepoys'.⁴⁴ To Canning, they were 'ignorant and childish, but excitable sepoys'.⁴⁵

While the government was busy regrouping its strength, rumours of various kinds were afloat that some of these soldiers who were out of employment did not return to their own districts in western Bihar or U.P., but hovered around the vicinity of Barrackpore.⁴⁶ This was coupled with the fact that at the time there were very strong Indian contingents stationed at Barrackpore, Dinapore, Benares, Allahabad, Kanpur, and in Awadh, while there were only five English regiments in the whole area – the 53rd and 84th near Calcutta, the 10th at Dinapore, the 32nd at Lucknow, and

⁴¹ Major General Hearsey to the Secretary to the Government of India, 31 March 1857, Enclosure 31 in Number 5, Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament, 1857, BLOC.

⁴² Telegram from Major-General Hearsay to Colonel R.J.H. Birch, Secretary to the Government of India in the Military Department dated 6 May 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 322, 22 May 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁴³ Special Narrative Number 14, Judicial Department, June 1857, Government of Bengal. WBSA.

⁴⁴ Special Narrative Number 14, Judicial Department, June 1857, Government of Bengal. WBSA.

⁴⁵ Michael Maclagan, *'Clemency' Canning: Charles John, 1st Earl Canning Governor-General and Viceroy of India 1856-1862*, London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1962, p. 102.

⁴⁶ Letter from A. R Young to the Secretary to the Government of India dated 14 May 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 326/a, 10 June 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

the 3rd, one of the Company's European regiments, at Agra.⁴⁷ In addition, there were in Barrackpore itself three Indian regiments, at least one of which had been affected earlier in the year. To disband the Barrackpore regiments was to reinforce the rebels with trained soldiers and to part with a single English soldier was to further weaken the hold over the province for the government. With this slender resource to rely on, Governor General Canning and his government had to preserve the peace along the entire course of the Ganges. However, fortunately for the government, the 84th Queen's Regiment had not returned to Pegu, and the Treaty with Persia had been ratified in Baghdad on 2 May 1857 which allowed Sir James Outram's forces to return to India.⁴⁸ Canning, under the present situation, had no other option but to expedite the return of the troops from Persia. He also ordered Lord Harris commanding the 43rd Queen's Regiment and the 1st Madras Fusiliers to be prepared for embarkation.⁴⁹ In addition, under Canning's instruction, the government despatched a steamer to Pegu to transport the 35th, another Queen's Regiment, stationed there.⁵⁰

What had particularly unnerved the colonial government in Calcutta as well as the European and Christian residents of the city was the information regarding the

⁴⁷ Letter sent from Canning to the Board of Directors in London dated 10 May 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number 248, 16 May 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

⁴⁸ Letter sent from Canning to the Board of Directors in London dated 10 May 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number 248, 16 May 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

⁴⁹ General Order from Governor General Canning to the Secretary to the Government of India dated 5 May 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number 78, 14 May 1857, Government of India, NAI. Also see: Thomas Rice Edward Holmes, *A History of the Indian Mutiny and of the Disturbances Which Accompanied It among the Civil Population*, 5th ed., London: Macmillan & Co Limited, 1898, pp. 112-13.

⁵⁰ General Order from Governor General Canning to the Secretary to the Government of India dated 5 May 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number 78, 14 May 1857, Government of India, NAI.

events unfolding in Meerut and Delhi, which had already begun trickling back to Calcutta. On 12 May 1857, the government in Calcutta received from Agra the following telegram from Meerut: ‘The Cavalry have risen setting fire to their own houses and several officers’ houses, besides having killed and wounded all European officers and soldiers they could find near the lines.’⁵¹ This kind of news seemed almost incredible in Calcutta. Meerut at the time had the strongest European force in India. The 60th Rifles, a Dragoon Regiment and large bodies of horse and foot artilleries made this station unusually powerful in terms of its European troops. And yet the incredible had happened. On 10 May 1857 the regiments at Meerut, consisting of the 3rd Bengal Light Cavalry and the 20th and 11th Regiments of Native Infantry, rose in rebellion, killed many of their officers, set fire to the station and rode off to Delhi. As William Pinch noted, the military uprising at Meerut on 10 May was a key factor in sparking off the wider rebellion that soon followed. The military mutiny and civil rebellion then fed off each other as the weeks and months passed.⁵² Likewise, in Delhi, no one was prepared. The Indian regiments there included the 38th, a corps which in Dalhousie’s time had refused to cross the ‘black water’ for service in Burma, at once joined the rebel sepoys.⁵³ To these were soon added the men of the 54th and later of the 74th Native Infantry. In a telegraphic despatch dated 12 May 1857 it was revealed that Delhi was already in the hands of the insurgents. On 14 May 1857 it was heard that the King of Delhi had been proclaimed as the

⁵¹ Judicial Proceeding Number 116, 19 May 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁵² William R. Pinch, “Prostituting the Mutiny: Sex-Slavery and Crime in the Making of 1857”, in Crispin Bates (ed.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Vol. 1: Anticipations and Experiences in the Locality, London: Sage Publications, 2013, p. 61.

⁵³ “The Indian Mutiny”, *Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, 14 May 1857.

supreme leader and that he was already in possession of the town and fort, massacring the European population.⁵⁴

The news of the fall of Delhi at the hands of the rebels was interpreted by the colonial government as the actual breakdown of the British authority in India and acted as a catalyst for the outburst of rebellion in the other parts of the country. The interesting thing to notice in this regard was the way the dates of the mutinies after the massacre of Delhi indicated a definite pattern. The rebellion in north India first broke out in Meerut followed by the siege of Delhi on 14 May, Aligarh on the 20 May, Etawah and Mainpuri on the 23 May, Lucknow on the 30 May, Kanpur on the 6 June. It seemed as if the rebellion was travelling down the Ganges valley with a time gap between the various stations required for the news to travel from one place to the other.⁵⁵ During the next few weeks the detailed reports of the massacres and disasters from all across were coming through as well. All these news along with some other related vague reports were slowly filtering down to Calcutta. Charles Ball, one of the contemporary chronicler as well as the earliest historians to write on the rebellion of 1857, wrote in this context,

The continuous arrival of disastrous intelligence from all quarters of the presidency of Bengal was received at the seat of the government... and the fact could no longer be ignored that a vast and formidable insurrectionary movement was progressing, and daily acquiring strength and organisation. The panic that had seized the European society at the distant stations began at last to roll, with hourly increasing eagerness, towards the capital. In every quarter, a sense of

⁵⁴ "Mutiny", *Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, 16 May 1857.

⁵⁵ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: pp. 65-66; John William Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-1858*, 3 vols., London: W.H. Allen, 1865, p. 432.

some undefined, but imminent and immediate danger oppressed the people.⁵⁶

Corroboration of Balls' description is provided by Colonel Orfeur Cavanagh, the Town Major. Cavanaugh in his private correspondence to Canning, stated in a similar fashion: '...the climate of opinion among the Europeans in Calcutta (is) that the present insurrection has taken a proportion that is unprecedented...the disastrous news of massacres from the north pouring in the city everyday is of genuine concern'.⁵⁷ The breakdown of the telegraph network and the Grand Trunk road made it difficult for the official reports to reach Calcutta. As the native daily newspaper *Sambad Prabhakar* reported:

The news from the north-west of the country is horrible to say the least. The reports that were previously coming from the up-country have been disrupted because of the lack of communication network. In spite of the government's trying effort in Calcutta to restore the postal and telegraph service, authentic news are hard to avail. Under this situation, whatever news has reached us is of deep concern. The rebel forces have been joined by other sepoys in Delhi and carnage has followed thereafter. They have looted the government treasury, gathered arms and ammunition from the depots and are now marching towards Calcutta.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Charles Esq Ball, *The History of the Indian Mutiny: Giving a Detailed Account of the Sepoy Insurrection in India; and a Concise History of the Great Military Events Which Have Tended to Consolidate British Empire in Hindostan*, 2 vols., London; New York: London Printing & Publishing Co., 1858, p. 154.

⁵⁷ Colonel Orfeur Cavanagh, the Town Major to Governor General Canning dated 22 May 1857, Secret and Political Consultations, 10 June 1857, Number: 2, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

⁵⁸ *Sambad Prabhakar*, 24 May 1857, pp. 2-3. The Translation from the original Bengali text is mine.

In a similar article, *Hindoo Patriot* noted that ‘the horrible details of mutiny and massacre of which rumours and reports have reached the town during the last few days have fallen upon a state of public feeling utterly unprepared to receive them even after the seditious misconduct and disbandment of two regiments of the line’.⁵⁹ The government now apprehended that in the event of the disbanded sepoy descending on the city, the Indian police would be of no avail. But keeping in mind with the severe scarcity of European soldiers around the city, Canning also realised at the same time that the government must not display any signs of alarm under the present circumstances.⁶⁰ Any symptoms of fear and panic in Calcutta would be magnified and make the situation even worse in the other parts of Bengal, and in Awadh, it might lead to a real disaster. Thus, he recommended that the routine of the Government House should proceed as usual and he himself endeavoured to set an example by remaining calm with every new instalment of disaster, actual or potential.⁶¹ Canning even held a State Ball which was arranged for the 25 May to

⁵⁹ “The Mutinies”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 21 May 1857 in Benoy Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals of 19th Century Bengal*, vol. 4: 1857, *Hindoo Patriot; Friend of India; Hindu Intelligencer; Bengal Hurkaru*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 1979, p. 57.

⁶⁰ “Lord Canning: His Trying Position,” in *The North British Review*, Vol.: XXXVII, Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1862, p. 229. *The North British Review* was a Scottish periodical founded in 1844, its first editor was David Welsh. As stated in the prospectus, the purpose of the periodical was not to be a theological journal but to include all subjects that would engage the ‘cultivated mind’. See Linda E. Connors and Mary Lu MacDonald, *National Identity in Great Britain and British North America, 1815-1851: The Role of Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, p. 158.

⁶¹ Letter sent from the Secretary to the Government of Bengal to Town Major dated 22 May 1857, Secret and Political Consultations Number 388, 30 May 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

celebrate the Queen's birthday, while Lady Canning refused to abandon her regular evening drives around the city of Calcutta.⁶²

Unfortunately however, most of the European population of the city was unable to put up this cool image and composure of the Governor General. Even the meagre sounds of fireworks that accompanied following the wedding of a Mysore princess was enough for them to bring out weapons for their own protections.⁶³ These acts were coupled with the numerous rumours that were already afloat in the bazars in and around the city.⁶⁴ Lord Canning in his private letter to Vernon Smith acknowledged the fact that never before did he come across 'such a set of old women with swords by their sides carrying the news of this town among the clubs and gossiping *tiffin* rooms of their acquaintances.'⁶⁵ Perhaps in deep anguish he added that hitherto the merchants and the non-official communities of the city had shown sense and calmness under similar circumstances, but under the present situation 'how long this will last if our officers and officials crawl about with their tails between

⁶² *Sambad Prabhakar*, 31 May 1857, p. 4. Also see: MacLagan, '*Clemency*' *Canning*: p. 86.

⁶³ "Calcutta and Its Safety", *Hindoo Patriot*, 11 June 1857.

⁶⁴ To cite one such example out of many, A.R. Young, the Secretary to the Government of Bengal mentioned in one of his narratives: 'The Commissioner of the Calcutta Police reported that having heard a report on the 1st of May that placard had been fixed up about a fortnight ago in the streets of Calcutta to the effect that "a certain white thing would not be found in Calcutta three months hence," he made enquiries on the subject and ascertained that no placards of the sort had ever been stuck up in Calcutta', Enclosure 2 in Number 19, Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament, 1857, Special Narrative of events, p. 558, BLOC.

⁶⁵ Letter sent from Canning to Vernon Smith, Judicial Proceeding Number 348, 19 May 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

their legs frightening themselves and everybody else with their whining I will not say.’⁶⁶

It was not that Canning was unable to read the actual situation. In fact in one of his extracts he admitted the stupidity on the part of the British government to have annexed Pegu, Nagpore and Awadh without adding a single English soldier to their strength. He wrote:

Although there is no lack of European regiments, there is no lack of Native ones, who have it all their own way. If this disaffection should spread and burst out into such violence as has been exhibited in Meerut and Delhi, you may imagine the plunder, slaughter, consternation and ruin which would ensue. The flame would spread without a check straight on end for 700 or 800 miles, over the richest tracts of India. And, literally, I could not under many weeks collect a force at any one spot on that line which would be strong enough to give any confidence to the Europeans... Whether the infection of the Mutiny will spread or not, no mortal man can say... and I have lost entirely all confidence in the commanding officers of the regiments.⁶⁷

Unfortunately for Canning and the colonial government, the above mentioned apprehensions were soon to be realised, especially in the province of Awadh.⁶⁸ To make the situation further complicated, the government in Calcutta feared that the followers of Wajid Ali Khan, the deposed Nawab of Awadh, who, along with his entourage was then living in Garden Reach in the south-western suburb of the city,

⁶⁶ Letter sent from Canning to Vernon Smith, Judicial Proceeding Number 348, 19 May 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁶⁷ Canning to Granville: 19 May 1857. Printed in Granville, I: pp. 247-249.

⁶⁸ For further details see Mukherjee, *Spectre of Violence: The 1857 Kanpur Massacres*.

would join hands with the rebellious sepoys. He and his visitors were kept under close surveillance.

Wajid Ali Khan and his followers seem to have caused considerable consternation for the colonial government at this time. The deposed King of Awadh, Wajid Ali Khan and his followers were then living in exile at Garden Reach in the southern part of Calcutta, and as sepoys of 34th Bengal Native Infantry were routinely deployed on guard duties in the city, there were numerous opportunities for communications. It is to be noted that both the 19th and the 34th regiment of the BNI had earlier been stationed in Awadh during the time of its annexation in 1856. As early as in January 1857, groups of sepoys belonging to the 34th BNI had already decided that they would no longer be serving under the British.⁶⁹ According to the native police officer Moinodin Hasan Khan, who had communicated with a number of sepoys from these two regiments, the annexation of Awadh had made a deep impression on these sepoys:

Both these regiments were full of bitterness towards the English Government, and from them letters were written to other Purbeah regiments...the letters reminded every regiment of the ancient dynasties of Hindustan and pointed out that the annexation of Oude had been followed by the disbandment of the Oude army...and showed that their place was being filled by the enlistment of Punjabis and Sikhs...the very bread had been torn out of the mouths of men who knew no other profession than that of the sword...Thus it was pressed upon the sepoys that they must rebel to reseat the ancient kings on their thrones, and drive the trespassers away. The welfare of

⁶⁹ Forrest, *Selections from the Letters*: Appendix D, LXXVII. Examination of Duriou Singh., pp. 156-59.

the soldier caste required this; the honour of their chiefs was at stake.⁷⁰

Some of the native officers of the 34th Bengal Native Infantry made contact with Raja Man Singh, one of the most powerful landowners of Awadh, and a desperate plot was hatched to seize the fort at Calcutta and reinstate Wajid Ali Khan.⁷¹ The plan was to take advantage of the presence of three companies of the 34th Native Infantry that would make a stop at Calcutta on their way to Chittagong. With their numbers thus augmented, the various units of the 34th Native Infantry on guard duties in Calcutta were to seize the fort with the assistance of the King of Awadh's men as well as the Calcutta Native Militia.⁷² The affair, however, was completely spoiled when the officer in charge of the plot was relieved and sent back to Barrackpore on the very day the rebellion was to happen. The ringleaders had furthermore failed to secure the assistance of their comrades in key positions and to inform them of the details of the plan. The attempt went ahead on the night of 26 January, but the running back and forth of the sepoy guards put the British at Fort William on guard, and the whole thing was eventually aborted.⁷³ There was a similar attempt in early March, involving the guards of both the regiments of 34th and the 2nd Bengal Native Infantry but the details of this affair were vague. However, what can be said with certainty was the fact that the sepoy guards posted in various locations in Calcutta

⁷⁰ Moinodin Hasan Khan, in Charles Theophilus Metcalfe (trans.), *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, Westminster: A. Constable and Co., 1898, pp. 37-38.

⁷¹ Forrest, *Selections from the Letters*: Vol. 1, Appendix D, LXXVII. Examination of Duriou Singh, p. 156.

⁷² Forrest, *Selections from the Letters*: Appendix D, LXXVII. Examination of Duriou Singh., pp. 156-59.

⁷³ Proceedings of the Court of Enquiry assembled at Barrackpore on Friday by order of Major General J.B. Hearsay Commanding the Presidency Division dated 17 April 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 288, 25 April 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

were to varying degrees involved in mutinous attempts during the early months of 1857.

It is thus significant that, as early as in January, the initial response of the frustrated sepoys was to seek to re-establish the old order, when being a soldier entailed a high social status, and to negotiate wages and terms of employment. The extent of the former king of Awadh's actual involvement in these plots remained obscure, but it seems unlikely that the rumours of the greased cartridges alone should have incited the sepoys to mutiny so early. As was the case with Vellore, the retainers of the former king might have played a more active role; several months later, three of them were apprehended on suspicion of tampering with the sepoys. The British certainly believed that the dethroned Wajid Ali Khan was behind the unrest, and Major-General John Hearsey, who commanded the Presidency Division at Barrackpore, was said to be 'confident that they have been tampered with, and thinks that he has traced this to the King of Oude's people at Garden Reach.'⁷⁴

Although the deposed Nawab of Awadh seldom moved out of his Garden Reach residence, his visitors were kept under close surveillance. It was reported that Man Singh, the Awadh Taluqdar, and Alle Nuckee Khan, the Prime Minister of the erstwhile Nawab, had visited Calcutta and held meetings with Wajid Ali Khan and other persons who were in the 'conspiratorial' league.⁷⁵ Tickaet Rao, the Steward of the Court of the deposed Nawab, was also an object of suspicion. Colonel Orfeur Cavanagh, the Town Major, mentioned in the 21 May entry of his journal that

⁷⁴ Letter sent from the A.R. Young to the Secretary to the Government of India Military Department dated 22 May 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 58, 30 May 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁷⁵ Letter sent from J.P. Grant to Canning, Judicial Proceedings Number 63, 10 June 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

according to his informant, Man Singh called for Wajid Ali Khan's sanction to a rising in his favour.⁷⁶ John Peter Grant, the member of the Governor General's Executive Council did not rule out any of these possibilities. He was firmly of the opinion that an emergency had arisen. On 10 June 1857 he wrote a letter to Governor General Canning wherein he spelt out the threats the Europeans were exposed to: 'We have as enemies three Native Infantry regiments and a half, of which one and a half are the very worst type we know; one, two, three (for no one knows) thousand armed men at Garden Reach, or available there at a moment; some hundred armed men of the Scinde Ameers at Dum Dum.'⁷⁷

It is important to mention in this context that the province of Sindh was formally annexed by the British forces under the commandship of General Charles Napier in the year 1843.⁷⁸ The tribal chieftains of Sindh, also known as the Amirs of Sindh, were defeated and taken as captives and were put in strict seclusion by the colonial government.⁷⁹ But under the present situation the government were visibly concerned regarding the motives of these Amirs, many of whom were located in Calcutta, as the prisoners of the state. The possibility of an impending threat from the Sindh Amirs was also expressed by the *Bengal Hurkaru* newspaper:

The Ameers of Scinde are residing at Dumdum and in its vicinity, they are *prisoners*, and still they are allowed to retain about four hundred armed men as followers, a low long haired Mahomedan

⁷⁶ Special Narrative Number 144, Judicial Proceeding, 10 June 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁷⁷ Special Narrative Number 144, Judicial Proceeding, 10 June 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁷⁸ Thomas Postans, *Personal Observations on Sindh; the Manners and Customs of Its Inhabitants, and Its Productive Capabilities: With a Sketch of Its History, a Narrative of Recent Events, and an Account of the Connection of the British Government with That Country, Etc*, London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1843, pp. 332-36.

⁷⁹ Postans, *Personal Observations*: p. 334.

rabble, who only wait for an opportunity of flashing their tulwars. So long as this station remains quiet, they may consider it their interest to sneak about the Station bazaars without arms, but the mischief these men are capable of doing is incalculable. Is it possible that our Government for a moment believe that in case of any disturbances (such as we are advised by authority to prepare for) these disreputable Mahomedans, thoroughly armed as they are within their own grounds, would remain passive spectators of our difficulty?⁸⁰

Under the circumstances the government therefore decided that in order to thwart the imminent threat from these groups of men it was important to move Wajid Ali Khan from his residence at Garden Reach. Accordingly on 15 June 1857, the former king along with Ali Nuckee Khan and three of his other associates were called upon and subsequently confined inside Fort William.⁸¹ Although Wajid Ali Khan tried hard to persuade the government of his innocence, he eventually gave up and surrendered to the authorities.⁸²

2.4 THE 'GREAT FEAR' OF CALCUTTA AND ITS VICINITY

It is against this background that the panic that gripped the colonial government all through these months needs to be understood. Both the colonial officials and the European population residing in Calcutta unexpectedly found themselves overwhelmed with a fear of being massacred by the rebels of 1857 and would bring

⁸⁰ *The Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, Friday 19 June 1857.

⁸¹ Judicial Proceedings Number 54 (a), 26 June 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA. Also see: Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-1858*: p. 40.

⁸² Letter sent from the Town Major to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Proceedings Number 58, 26 June 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

an abrupt end to the rule of the Company. The feeling now dawned upon them that all the recent radical changes brought about by the government had antagonised the Indians to a large extent. In fact in an earlier letter to the Office of the Adjutant General, Major-General Hearsey tried to caution the government regarding some of these restlessness and uneasiness prevailing among the sepoys and the inhabitants of the city.⁸³ John William Kaye wrote that ‘the native mind was at this time in a most sensitive state and easily wrought upon by suspicious appearances.’⁸⁴ He in fact goes on to mention that there were amongst the European officers of the Bengal army many ‘earnest minded and zealous Christians’ who used to seriously think of saving the souls of the indigenous people by teaching them from the Bible. Kaye’s argument is corroborated by a letter from Lieutenant Colonel Wheeler dated 15 April 1857, who wrote to the government that ‘when speaking therefore to a native on the subject of religion, I am then acting in the capacity of a Christian soldier under the authority of my heavenly superior.’⁸⁵ Writing about a decade later, Kaye commented that such men ‘did grievous wrong to the Government they professed to serve.’⁸⁶ Clare Anderson points out in this context that it is little wonder that many Indians regarded

⁸³ Major General Hearsey to the Secretary to the Government of India, Barrackpore, February 11, 1857, Enclosure 20 in Number 3, Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1857, BLOC.

⁸⁴ Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-1858*: p. 42.

⁸⁵ Colonel Wheeler to the Secretary to the Government of India, 15 April 1857, Enclosure 20 in Number 7, Appendix to Papers relative to the Mutinies in the East Indies Presented to Both the Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1857, BLOC; Clare Anderson also mentioned a similar remark made by General Wheeler. See Clare Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857-8: Prisons, Prisoners, and Rebellion*, Anthem South Asian Studies, London; New York: Anthem Press, 2007, pp. 4-5.

⁸⁶ Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-1858*: p. 346.

missionaries as the religious arm of the Company.⁸⁷ In an article dated 17 April 1857, *Hindu Intelligencer* shared the similar apprehension: ‘there seems to be a feeling predominant in the minds of all classes of natives, that it is the intention of Government to subvert forcibly their (native) faith and make them lose caste...that the Government is bent on converting them to Christianity at the point of the sword’.⁸⁸ Kaye further wrote that the native population of the city was so much apprehensive of losing their religion in the hands of the British authorities that even the sight of Lady Canning’s carriage in front of the Bethune Female School and her frequent visits there were being interpreted by them as motivated and a part of a deep conspiracy against their tradition.⁸⁹

Wagner has noted that these rumours would not have been so much in circulation if they had not reflected a shared perception of contemporary events, and thus been considered credible by the native population. Absurd as they may appear, at times, these rumours were not just hearsay or idle chatter. They represented a significant medium through which the native population attempted to comprehend the actions of the British and make sense of an unfamiliar situation.⁹⁰ One may certainly raise questions about the reliability of Kaye’s perceptions of the native superstitions or descriptions of the panic amongst the European inhabitants and the administration since it provided the necessary justification for the harsh counter-

⁸⁷ Anderson, *Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion*: p. 5.

⁸⁸ “The Government and the Existing Feelings of the Natives”, *Hindu Intelligencer*, 17 April 1857. *Hindu Intelligencer* was a weekly English newspaper edited by Kasi Prasad Ghosh. At the time of the rebellion of 1857, *Intelligencer* was one of the few English language newspapers that were edited by Indians. The newspaper ceased to operate following the censorship of the press by Canning in June 1857.

⁸⁹ Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-1858*: p. 348.

⁹⁰ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: pp. 71-72.

measures – strangling the voice of the press, allowing Europeans to carry arms while denying the natives the same, extraordinary powers to the civil and military officers to carry out summary trials and the punishment of all who were under suspicion without the reference of the Headquarters – to be taken by the colonial government.⁹¹ What is beyond doubt is the fact that the course of events that were occurring in various parts of north-central Gangetic heartland, coupled with the prevailing rumours about the forced conversions by the Christian evangelicals and the subsequent proclamations⁹² issued from Kanpur and elsewhere, made the native population deeply concerned. This concern was also expressed by the *Bengal Hurkaru* which urged the Governor General to issue a declaration, without any further delay, stating their intentions clearly to the native people.⁹³ Canning tried to address at least some of them by announcing to the Council his intention of issuing a proclamation which would testify that the government had no intention of tempering with the religious belief of the Indians and denying all the false charges that were labelled against the government.⁹⁴ Canning himself later confessed to the Military Secretary Colonel Birch that he regretted for not having issued it earlier, as Birch had

⁹¹ These points are discussed at length in the subsequent sections.

⁹² To cite one example out of many, in one of the Urdu proclamations issued from Kanpur on 5 June 1857 under the name of Nana Saheb, it was clearly spelt out that ‘the Sahibs at Calcutta [the Governor-General and Council] issued an order to the effect that the main aim behind the distribution of the cartridges was to Christianise the Indian army, for once the soldiers convert to Christianity, it will not take long to convert the common people... This became known through one of the Bengalis who was employed in the cartridge-making establishment’. Quoted from: Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *The Great Uprising in India 1857-58, Untold Stories, Indian and British*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, p. 9.

⁹³ “The Educated Natives and the Government”, *Bengal Hurkaru*, 22 May 1857.

⁹⁴ The following day the proclamation was published in *Bengal Hurkaru* newspaper. See: “Proclamation”, *Bengal Hurkaru*, 23 May 1857.

advised.⁹⁵ But it is doubtful whether this proclamation, even if it was published earlier, would have much of an effect as it seemed unlikely under the present situation the Indians could have been persuaded by such logic from the government.

Considering the exigency of the situation, various other local organisations comprising the Europeans and the Christian population of the city came forward to offer their services to the government. For instance, in a general meeting organised by the Calcutta Trade Association on 20 May 1857, it was resolved by the members of the Association to send to the government a statement that they were prepared to afford the government every possible assistance in their power towards the preservation of order and the protection of the Christian community of Calcutta ‘either by serving as special constables or otherwise, in such manner as may appear most desirable to the Government.’⁹⁶ Similarly, the French and the Armenian inhabitants, the native community in Calcutta and the British Indian Association all presented their petition to the government offering their services under the prevailing situation.⁹⁷ Perhaps more interestingly, even sections of the Indian population of the city too had come up with their concern and their desire to assist the government.⁹⁸ Most prominent amongst others was the meeting organised by the Committee of the British Indian Association headed by the Honorary Secretary of the Association Raja Iswar Chandra Singha of the Paikpara Raj family. The committee passed a resolution on the 22 May 1857 criticising the atrocities committed by the rebels across the

⁹⁵ Maclagan, *'Clemency' Canning*: p. 83.

⁹⁶ Resolution of the Calcutta Trade Association, 20 May 1857, Enclosure 3, Papers related to the Mutinies in East Indies, Supplement to the Papers presented July 1857, p. 2, BLOC.

⁹⁷ “Loyal Demonstrations”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 28 May 1857.

⁹⁸ For further details on the proceedings of the meetings organised by various native organisations in and around Calcutta, see Papers related to the Mutinies in East Indies, Supplement to the Papers presented in July 1857, pp. 2-12, BLOC.

country: 'The Committee view with disgust and horror the disgraceful and mutinous conduct of the native soldiery... and the excesses committed by them' and earnestly hoped that peace would soon be restored by the vigorous measures that the government had adopted in this exigency.⁹⁹ Following the precedence set by the British India Association, the Muslim residents of the city too held a meeting on the 27 May 1857 extending their full cooperation to the colonial government.¹⁰⁰

It is to be noted that Canning had previously turned down the offer that was being made by the French consul and residents in Calcutta regarding their services to the colonial government in consequence of the rebellion of the Indian regiments in the city. He firmly believed that since 'everything is quiet within 600 miles of the capital' there would be no need to call for the services of the French community.¹⁰¹ The disturbances caused by the passing of the 'groundless panic has already been arrested' and therefore Canning was confident that peace and stability would soon be restored in Calcutta in a few days' time.¹⁰² But it was increasingly becoming apparent to Canning that the attempts made by him and his government in order to persuade the sepoys stationed in and around Calcutta were not successful. The occurrence of the subsequent incidents in Calcutta in the month of May 1857 did not

⁹⁹ Proceedings of a Meeting of the Committee of the British Indian Association, 22 May 1857, Enclosure 9, Papers related to the Mutinies in East Indies, Supplement to the Papers presented July 1857, p. 5, BLOC.

¹⁰⁰ Proceedings of a Meeting of the Mahomedans of Calcutta, 27 May 1857, Enclosure 15, Papers related to the Mutinies in East Indies, Supplement to the Papers presented July 1857, p. 9, BLOC.

¹⁰¹ Letter from the Secretary to the Governor General to the French Consul in Calcutta, Judicial Proceedings, 25 May 1857, Government of Bengal. WBSA; *also*, Enclosure 8, Papers related to the Mutinies in East Indies, Supplement to the Papers presented July 1857, BLOC.

¹⁰² Letter from the Secretary to the Governor General to the French Consul in Calcutta, Judicial Proceedings, 25 May 1857, Government of Bengal. WBSA; *also*, Enclosure 8, Papers related to the Mutinies in East Indies, Supplement to the Papers presented July 1857, BLOC.

help his cause either. Canning's hopes were soon belied when a sealed document, written in Persian, was discovered from a crowded part of the city that called upon 'the faithful among the inhabitants of the city to rise *en masse*, and kill the Feringhee Kaffirs.'¹⁰³ The terror of the European community became excessive upon this discovery, coupled with the report that the former king of Awadh had left his residence at Calcutta for some purpose unknown to the government, but imagined to be in connection with the proceedings in his late kingdom.¹⁰⁴

The situation in Calcutta deteriorated even further when a plot was discovered on 17 May 1857 that abruptly destroyed whatever delusion the government had about the possibility of an existing danger around the city. It was found out that in the evening of the same day, i.e., 17 May 1857, sepoys belonging to the 25th regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry, who were encamped along with another wing of the 47th Native Infantry on the Esplanade area between the Coolie bazar and the Fort William, were planning to hold communication with the soldiers on guard duty.¹⁰⁵ These soldiers belonged to the 2nd and the 70th Regiment of the Native Infantry. The plan was to obtain a portion of the ammunitions from the guard soldiers and to make a surprise attack upon the Fort William at night, slaughtering the European population within the fort.¹⁰⁶ Once the Fort was captured, the guns were to be turned upon the European ships on the bank of the Ganges. The next step was to plunder the remaining European inhabitants of the city, and march towards Delhi in order to join

¹⁰³ "The Panic", *Hindoo Patriot*, 12 May 1857.

¹⁰⁴ "The Panic", *Hindoo Patriot*, 12 May 1857.

¹⁰⁵ "The Metropolis and its Safety", *Hindoo Patriot*, 21 May 1857 in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 61.

¹⁰⁶ Colonel O. Cavenagh, Town and Fort Major, to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Proceedings Number 186, 26 May 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

the other rebel forces.¹⁰⁷ The point to be noted in this context is that the rebels had not only charted out a plan of the whole attack, but also were conscious of the importance of preventing the intelligence being conveyed out of the city. Also to be noted from the plan is the fact that the mutinous sepoys did not contemplate the possibility of broadening their mass base in and around the city of Calcutta; they were rather interested in joining their brethren in northern India. Fortunately for the colonial government the sepoy-guards at the Fort William did not conform to the plan and reported the whole scheme of things to the Fort Major.¹⁰⁸ As a consequence, without wasting any further time, orders were issued to place the Fort in a state of security:

The drawbridges were raised and the ladders withdrawn from the ditches; the guns on the bastions were posted; additional guards were placed over the arsenal; European sentinels were stationed at the officer's quarters and on the ramparts; while patrols, within and without the fort, were kept on duty throughout the night.¹⁰⁹

In addition, a requisition was also forwarded to Dumdum the following day for the 53rd European Regiment to be marched to the Fort William without a moment of delay.¹¹⁰ Thus with the timely interception and immediate precautionary measures, the colonial government, coupled with the loyalty of the sepoy guards belonging to the 2nd and 70th Regiment of the Native Infantry, was able to avoid a serious

¹⁰⁷ Colonel O. Cavanagh, Town and Fort Major, to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Proceedings Number 186, 26 May 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA; Secret and Political Consultation Number 64-5, 28 May 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁰⁸ Colonel Cavanagh Town and Fort Major to Vernon Smith, Judicial Proceedings Number 213, 26 May 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁰⁹ Colonel Cavanagh Town and Fort Major to Vernon Smith, Judicial Proceedings Number 213, 26 May 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹¹⁰ Secret and Political Consultation Number 64-5, 28 May 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

massacre in the seat of the colonial administration, though not without a lingering suspicion.

These kind of rumours and reports of an impending attack by the rebellious sepoys upon Calcutta created a climate of opinion in favour of more coercive measures. *The North British Review* later reported: 'Every fresh symptom of danger, as it arose, called forth a clamorous outcry for the adoption of some specific measure. All sorts of strange and incredible reports were floating about in the social atmosphere.'¹¹¹ Some even suggested a general disarming of the Indian sepoys as a precautionary measure. Lord Canning, it is true, resisted some of these extremely alarmist suggestions. It was in this spirit that he firmly refused to agree to accept a petition suggesting that martial law should be proclaimed throughout Bengal; and, to the satisfaction of the Queen Victoria and the Prince, he passed a resolution to ensure that captured sepoys should not be punished without regard to the gravity of their offences.¹¹² The other probable reason for his initial refusal to introduce harsh retaliatory measures was because 'there was a reasonable apprehension that strong measures would drive into active hostility men who were merely dallying on the banks, and not yet prepared to plunge into the stream.'¹¹³ Although there might be a grain of truth that Canning showed remarkable leniency towards his native subjects during the rebellion of 1857, but contrary to general perception, he was not always the epitome of clemency. Earlier in May 1857 Sir Henry Lawrence who had already been granted the military rank of Brigadier General was vested with the

¹¹¹ "Lord Canning: His Trying Position," *The North British Review*, Vol.: XXXVII, Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1862, p. 229.

¹¹² Christopher Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001, p. 250.

¹¹³ "First Measures," *The North British Review*, Vol.: XXXVII, 1862, p. 227.

extraordinary power. Canning wrote, ‘You have full military powers. The Governor General will support you in everything that you think necessary.’¹¹⁴ In fact, on 30 May and 6 June 1857 Canning promulgated two more coercive acts which made a mockery of the Rule of Law.¹¹⁵ On the 6 June 1857, Governor General Lord Canning passed an Act giving extraordinary powers to civil and military officers to carry out summary trials and punishment of all who were under suspect without the reference of the Headquarters.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, after some initial hesitation, he also acceded to the demands of the European officers for the enrolment of the volunteers. On 13 June two other decisions were taken. In order to stifle dissentient voices in the press, Canning introduced into the Legislative Council a Bill for controlling the Press in Calcutta.¹¹⁷ While introducing the Bill Canning said:

Whilst I am glad to give credit to the conductors of the European Press for the loyalty and intelligence which mark their labours, I am bound by sincerity to say that I have seen passages in some of the papers under their management which, though perfectly innocuous as far as European readers are concerned, may, in times like the present, be turned to the most mischievous purposes in the hands of the persons capable of dressing them up for the native ear...¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Canning to Henry Lawrence, Judicial Proceedings Number 640, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹¹⁵ Judicial Proceedings Number 484, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹¹⁶ General Order by the Governor-General of India in Council, Act Number XIV of 1857, 6 June 1857, Enclosure 15, Appendix to the Papers related to the Mutinies in East Indies, 1857, pp. 16-18, BLOC.

¹¹⁷ The Calcutta Gazette, *The Gagging Act*, Legislative Council, 13 June 1857. Also see: *Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, 13 June 1857.

¹¹⁸ Letter sent from Canning to Vernon Smith dated 13 June 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number 754, 24 June 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

A more detailed argument in favour of the promulgation of the Press Act was also put forward by Lady Canning in her journal. She wrote with deep contempt that the English press had been publishing 'all sorts of imaginary reasons and grievances' as the cause for the rebellion, thereby spreading panic and alarm amongst the colonial administration as well as the civil population of the city.¹¹⁹ She was particularly critical of *The Friend of India*, a weekly newspaper that 'thinks itself as great here as *The Times* in London', which had published a long detailed account of the position of the whole of the English troops and the tracts of unprotected country 'and told exactly how vulnerable we were and must be until such and such reinforcements could arrive.'¹²⁰

One of the most significant aspects of this particular act was that no distinction was made between the European and the Indian Press. As British historian Michael Maclagan had pointed out, there was no doubt that this measure, by the hostility it aroused, did more harm to the reputation of Canning than any other of his acts.¹²¹ The Indian press, no matter of what language or opinion had hitherto always been to the

¹¹⁹ Lady Canning's Journal Letter dated 15 June 1857, quoted in Maclagan, '*Clemency*' Canning: p. 104.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid. Michael Maclagan was a British historian of early medieval England and Byzantium, an eminent authority on genealogy and heraldry, and for more than 40 years a tutor in Modern History at Trinity College, Oxford, where he is remembered for the formidable range of his interests and his elegance and precision. Maclagan's mother was related to the Cannings, a connection which Maclagan later celebrated in a biography of "Clemency" Canning, Governor-General and Viceroy of India during the Mutiny, which won him the Society of Indexers' Wheatley Medal in 1963. 'Michael Maclagan' in *The Telegraph* 16 September 2003 (online edition) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1441535/Michael-Maclagan.html> (Accessed 10 November 2012)

highest degree critical and independent.¹²² This was the reason why this act was derisively described as the ‘Gagging Act’ by the English press.¹²³ The bulk of Canning’s ire was reserved for the Anglo-Indian press, particularly in Calcutta, and the wider European community that aided and abetted the papers. The relationship between the European press in India and the East India Company, as Chandrika Kaul informs us, was often rather tumultuous and marked by attempts on the part of officials to curb press intrusion and comment.¹²⁴ Quite understandably therefore the passing of the Act XV of 1857 provoked heavy criticism from various quarters, especially from the English newspapers. The *Bengal Hurkaru* in its editorial column of 15 June 1857 was visibly furious with the enactment of the Press Act and announced that they ‘cannot for one moment admit the necessity for such an extreme step even at the present time.’¹²⁵ *Hurkaru* saw it as a direct insult to their honour and integrity since according to them in the performance of their duties as journalists they had done their best to support the cause of the colonial government. Although they have been ‘compelled occasionally to comment severely’ on what they considered to be the instances of official ignorance, but those were certainly not unjust in any ways.¹²⁶

¹²² “The Mutinies, the English Press and the Natives,” *Hindoo Patriot*, 9 July 1857.

¹²³ For further details on the Gagging Act and the reactions that it had provoked from the various quarters, see the Appendix to Chapter 2.

¹²⁴ Chandrika Kaul, “‘You Cannot Govern By Force Alone’: W.H. Russell, The Times and the Great Rebellion”, in Marina Carter and Crispin Bates (eds.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume 3: Global Perspectives, London: Sage Publications, 2013, pp. 18-35: 24.

¹²⁵ “The Press is Gagged,” *Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, 15 June 1857.

¹²⁶ “The Press is Gagged,” *Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, 15 June 1857.

A similar article in consequence of the censorship of press was also published by the *Dacca News* on the 20 June 1857. The *Dacca News* came down heavily upon the government in view of the fact that they had been forced to ‘choose between an unpleasant censorship or a dishonest silence.’¹²⁷ Likewise, *The Friend of India* were deeply anguished by the fact that ‘there is not a man in Calcutta, or elsewhere, who will put upon the excepted paragraphs the construction which Lord Canning has chosen to fix on them, or who will adopt any other conclusion than the palpable one.’¹²⁸ As a consequence of these types of articles that were being published at a regular basis, the license of the *Bengal Hurkaru* was withdrawn on 18 September, to be restored again on the 23 September after the resignation of the offending editor had been secured by the proprietor. Many newspapers, including the *Dacca News*, *The Friend of India*, *Durbeen* and *Samachar Sudhabarshan* were also warned subsequently.¹²⁹

On the same day when the Press Act was passed, Corps of Volunteer Guards of Calcutta was also formed that comprised mainly of Europeans and East Indians. The corps consisted of a battery of four guns, four troops of cavalry and five companies of infantry.¹³⁰ In terms of organisation it was decided that the Commandant and two Adjutants (Military Officers) were to be appointed by the government. The officers of the troops and companies were to be selected by the volunteers, but needed to be

¹²⁷ *Dacca News*, 20 June 1857.

¹²⁸ “The First Warning,” *The Friend of India*, 2 July 1857.

¹²⁹ See the Appendix B for further details.

¹³⁰ “Rules for the Formation of a Volunteer Corps,” *Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, Friday, 19 June 1857.

confirmed by the government.¹³¹ The cavalry was to be divided into squads of five, while the infantry into a squad of ten, each under a non-commissioned officer.¹³² Although it was part of civil defence, its leitmotif was to arm sections of the white population of Calcutta in order to guard against the rebellious sepoys and distrustful police. Spurred by all these, the European population of Calcutta made frantic efforts to arm themselves. The Commissioner of Police admitted there was hardly a house inhabited by Christians in Calcutta, which did not contain one or more muskets or pistols.¹³³

Thus, there were adequate incendiary materials in the vicinity of Calcutta for the rumours to feed on. There were persistent demands from the European residents of Calcutta for the posting of European guards in the White Town. But in view of the dispatch of troops to Benares and Allahabad, Canning could not overstretch his slender resources. Nevertheless, so potent was the alarm that some reinforcements of European troops for the city and Barrackpore had to be arranged to reassure the Europeans living in Calcutta. However that it did not have much effect on the Europeans is clear from the letters of Rev. Alexander Duff. He wrote,

The four native regiments at Barrackpore, Fort William, and the Esplanade in front of it, with another newly arrived from Burmah, known to be “mutinous to the very core”... it was to be the signal for a general rise and massacre, which would have opened like wildfire into

¹³¹ “Rules for the Formation of a Volunteer Corps,” *Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, Friday, 19 June 1857.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Judicial Proceedings Number 656, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

the very heart of Calcutta, where there were thousands eagerly ready for insurrection, and plunder, and bloodshed.¹³⁴

The atmosphere of fear and panic that prevailed in and around the city is perhaps best illustrated in the series of letters that were written by Rev. Alexander Duff. As a Christian missionary he had already spent nearly three decades in India. Apart from evangelical activities, he took an active interest in the spread of western education. Between 16 May 1857 and 22 March 1858 he wrote twenty-five fairly long letters to Dr. Tweedie, Convener of the Free Church of Scotland's Foreign Mission Committee, and published in the Edinburgh newspaper, *The Witness*.¹³⁵ These letters were significant for two reasons: firstly, Duff was not an official spokesman of the British East India Company, and is thus more reliable in his description and analysis of the situation than many other British officials. In fact, Alexander Duff himself raised the question of the reliability of the official description time and again. He wrote, 'Their object very naturally is, to have it proclaimed that all is quiet – all right; that all are contented, all satisfied, all happy; since such a state of things would redound to their own credit, flatter their self-complacency and earn for them at once promotion and renown.'¹³⁶ Secondly, at this time he was staying in Calcutta and was the eye-witness of the whole proceedings.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Alexander Duff, *The Indian Rebellion: Its Causes and Results. In a Series of Letters*, 2 vols.: London: Nisbet, 1858, p. 16.

¹³⁵ Esther Breitenbach, "Scottish Presbyterian Missionaries and Public Opinion in Scotland", in Andrea Major and Crispin Bates (eds.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, vol. 2 Britain and the Indian Uprising, London: Sage Publications, pp. 74-94: 80.

¹³⁶ Letter Number: XX in Duff, *The Indian Rebellion*: p. 294.

¹³⁷ For a more detailed reading of Alexander Duff's position and intention while reporting the development of the rebellion, see: Breithenbach, "Scottish Presbyterian Missionaries": pp. 80-82.

A panic measure undertaken by General Hearsey in Barrackpore on the 13 June 1857 made matters still worse for the colonial government. Hearsey informed Governor General Canning that the sepoys at Barrackpore had ‘conspired’ to rise in revolt on the night of the 13 June 1857, and that he had requisitioned for the 78th Highlanders from Chinsura to help the government disarm the suspected regiments.¹³⁸ It is important to note that although Canning gave his consent, he was apprehensive about its possible impact on the morale of the remaining regiments of the Bengal Native Infantry, whose loyalty was still beyond reproach. On the morning of the 14 June 1857, a general disarming of the sepoys took place in Barrackpore and that too in the presence of the Highlanders who managed to reach there from Chinsura.¹³⁹ Similarly at around the same time the Indian guards, whom the colonial government thought had been affected by the spirit of rebellion, were also disarmed without much of an effort. The moral of the story was that an armed Indian sepoy could no longer be trusted. Neither the military nor the civilian authorities had ever been so nervous. Not at least since the discontent was first noticed in Dumdum earlier that year.

It was in this context that Calcutta witnessed a scene reminiscent of, in the words of Lefebvre, ‘The Great Fear of 1789’ in France.¹⁴⁰ The colonial officials as well as the European population residing in Calcutta came to believe in the rumour that an uprising had ‘actually taken place’ in Barrackpore the previous night and that

¹³⁸ Letter from Hearsey to Canning, Judicial Proceedings Number 355, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA; Also see: Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-1858*: p. 27.

¹³⁹ Judicial Proceedings Number 657, 10 August, 1857, Government of Bengal. WBSA.

¹⁴⁰ Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*.

the rebels were marching towards Calcutta.¹⁴¹ If they succeeded in reaching the city, it was said, the deposed Nawab of Awadh's men would join them and no European house would be spared. Forgetting that Fort William was held tightly by the English troops, forgetting that Calcutta contained more Europeans than in any other city of India, forgetting even that they themselves had been enrolled as volunteers, the inhabitants of the city gave themselves up in an orgy of panic. *Hindu Intelligencer* noted in its editorial on 18 June 1857 that 'from an early hour in the morning a great shudder ran through the capital, and soon the confused activity of panic flight was apparent.'¹⁴²

From the morning of 14 June the European quarters of the city were firmly in the grip of a panic. On this 'Panic Sunday', the Europeans were found scurrying for cover either in the safety of the fort or in any ship or steamer anchored in the midstream of the river. Others unearthed rusty weapons of whose use they were almost ignorant, and barricaded their doors, while the more valorous ones went to the streets of Calcutta in search of an enemy whom not even their imagination could produce. There was a prevailing feeling amongst the residents of the city that enemies were on their track, and that a general massacre was soon to follow if they failed to get themselves into the Fort William.¹⁴³

This wild behaviour was not only confined to the European civil population of the city, for a number of officers, both civil and military establishments, played a part in it. The government officials had a hard time persuading them to believe that the

¹⁴¹ Duff, *The Indian Rebellion*: p. 298.

¹⁴² "Panic in Calcutta", *Hindu Intelligencer*, 18 June 1857. John William Kaye seemed to have used the same editorial in describing the panic in Calcutta. See: Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-1858*: p. 30.

¹⁴³ Judicial Proceedings Number 615, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

rumour had no substance. It was the duty of Colonel Cavanagh, the Town Major, to convince the frightened populace that no harm would come their way and that the city was safe.¹⁴⁴ But he found the task difficult. In his own admission, ‘on my return home, I found my house besieged by all sorts of people wishing to obtain shelter in the Fort, and all full of rumours of the worst description from Dumdum and Barrackpore. I endeavoured to reassure them to the best of my power; but I am sure that many left under the impression that I was misleading them.’¹⁴⁵ For several hours throughout the day, the whole streets of houses in the richest quarters of Calcutta and its vicinity, the Chowringhee, stood empty and deserted. Dr. Mouat, an eye-witness to the account, compared the scamper across the city to ‘what might have been if a modern Herculaneum had been evacuated in broad daylight on the approach of a visible eruption from a neighbouring volcano.’¹⁴⁶ This kind of confusion caused by panic continued throughout the day, but as nothing had happened, it gradually came to subside and the Europeans returned home, though not without lingering apprehension.

Close on the heels of ‘Panic Sunday’ was another panic on 23 June 1857, the centenary day of the Battle of Plassey. Kim Wagner has pointed out there was a general prophecy among both the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal that the reign of the East India Company in India, established after the battle of Plassey in 1757, was to last exactly one hundred years.¹⁴⁷ In other words, that at the end of one hundred years from its commencement on 23 June 1757, it was destined suddenly to

¹⁴⁴ Judicial Proceedings Number 623, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁴⁵ Judicial Proceedings Number 623, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Sir Evan Cotton, *Calcutta Old and New: A Historical & Descriptive Handbook to the City*, Calcutta: W. Newman & Co., 1907, pp. 159-60.

¹⁴⁷ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: p. 74. Also see: Mukerjee. *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 75.

terminate in a terrible overthrow.¹⁴⁸ Sitaram Pandey, a sepoy serving in the 12th Punjab Infantry, wrote in his autobiographical narrative: ‘Our learned men had told us that the Company's rule would come to an end in 1857, since this was one hundred years after the Company's first great battle’.¹⁴⁹ During the rebellion it was a strongly held belief that the expulsion of the British was final, and as Mukherjee pointed out, it was conceivable that for many sepoys who took to arms in 1857 the fight represented the pursuit of the centennium.¹⁵⁰ John Everett, a *Risaladar* of the 14th regiment of the Irregular Cavalry, later recalled a Muslim officer of the same regiment in the Company's service by the name of Mirza Taki Beg, recorded to have said that ‘it was written in his books that a change would take place and that the British rule would soon be overthrown’.¹⁵¹ Everett's statement was further corroborated by Ahsan Ullah Khan, physician to Bahadur Shah Zafar, during the latter's trial. Khan admitted that a person by the name of Muhammad Hasan Askari, a priest by descent who used to visit the King (Bahadur Shah) frequently, prophesised that ‘the King of Persia with his army would annihilate the British power in the East, would restore the King (Bahadur Shah) to his ancient throne and reinstate him his kingdom, and at the same time the infidels, meaning the British, would be all slaughtered’.¹⁵² Furthermore, in the proclamation of Bahadur Shah, dated 25 August

¹⁴⁸ Duff, *The Indian Rebellion*: p. 30.

¹⁴⁹ James Lunt (ed.) *From Sepoy to Subedar: being the Life and Adventures of Subedar Sita Ram, a Native Officer of the Bengal Army Written and Related by Himself*. Translated by Lieutenant-Colonel Norgate. Reprint, New Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1970, p. 173.

¹⁵⁰ Mukherjee. *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 76.

¹⁵¹ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: p. 74. For further details see: Testimony of John Everett dated 27 February 1858, in Pramod K. Nayar (ed.), *The Trial of Bahadur Shah Zafar*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007, p. 111.

¹⁵² Testimony of Ahsan Ullah Khan dated 3 February 1858, in Nayar (ed.), *The Trial of Bahadur Shah Zafar*: pp. 20-24.

1857, noted that ‘the ancient works, both of the Hindoos and the Mahommedans, the writings of the miracle workers, and the calculations of the astrologers, pundits and rammals, all agree in asserting that the English will no longer have any footing in India or elsewhere’.¹⁵³ Although the exact origin of such a prophecy could not be traced, to the contemporary official, the prophecy probably appeared to predict the intervention of the Amir of Afghanistan. The links between Calcutta, Delhi, Peshawar and Kabul were very strong and the memories of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali still fresh. Some of the rebels and leaders hoped that the Amir of Afghanistan would intervene to save their cause.¹⁵⁴

The prevailing situation in Calcutta became all the more tense, particularly after the arrest of the deposed Nawab Wajid Ali Khan and his compatriots, namely Talukdar Man Singh, Mulayam Singh among others. Alexander Duff, who was at the point of time residing in Calcutta, in one of his private letters described in detail the considerable alarm that existed among the European population of Calcutta during this time. In the letter Duff mentioned about an ‘elaborate plan’ that was being hatched by the men of the deposed Nawab of Awadh in the city about a general uprising that was to take place on 23 June, the centenary day of the battle of Plassey.¹⁵⁵ Duff however did not specify the details of the plan apart from the fact that a map of Calcutta was discovered, sketched out as to divide the whole of town into sections and a general rise was planned to take place on 23 June. On that day

¹⁵³ Quoted in S. A. Rizvi and M. Bhargava (eds.), *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh*, 6 vols. Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Publications Bureau, 1957, p. 453.

¹⁵⁴ Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, “Clemency Canning, the Telegraph, Information and Censorship during 1857”, in Marina Carter and Crispin Bates (eds.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume 3: Global Perspectives, London: Sage Publications, pp. 67-86: p. 77.

¹⁵⁵ Duff, *The Indian Rebellion*: p. 33.

‘the city was to be taken, and the “Feringhi Kaffirs”, or British and other Christian inhabitants, to be all massacred...parties who swore on the Koran, and proved that they had taken an active share in the butchery and pillage of the Europeans, were to have certain sections of the town allotted to them for their own special benefit.’¹⁵⁶

As mentioned before, the deposed Nawab of Awadh along with his close associates were arrested on 15 June and were lodged in as a prisoner of state in Fort William, followed by the arrest of several others associated with him in Bengal.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps not yet aware of the fact that the Nawab was being already arrested, Duff expressed his anxiety regarding the possible connection between the Nawab of Awadh’s men with the rebels of Gangetic heartland. In his letter dated 16 June 1857 the needle of his suspicion was against Wajid Ali Khan and his associates:

Not far from Allepore is Garden Reach, where the ex-King of Oude has been residing, with about a thousand armed retainers, the Mussulman population, generally armed also, breathing fanatical vengeance on the “infidels” and praying in their mosques for the success of the Delhi rebels. Calcutta, being guarded by native Police only, in whom not a particle of confidence can any longer be reposed, seemed to be exposed on all sides to imminent perils as most of the European soldiers had been sent to the North-West.¹⁵⁸

In order to thwart the inevitable danger and possible extermination at the hands of the rebels, guns were placed in ‘some of the more dangerous neighbourhoods’ in

¹⁵⁶ Duff, *The Indian Rebellion*: p. 33.

¹⁵⁷ Report of the number and description of persons residing on the premises of the King of Oudh at Garden Reach, Foreign Department Proceedings Volume 30, July 1858, Number 236 SC, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁵⁸ Duff, *The Indian Rebellion*: p. 25.

addition to small companies of European troops.¹⁵⁹ At night the streets were perambulated by bodies of armed horsemen. Places of rendezvous were fixed in case of a sudden outbreak in any of the quarter of the city. In addition, all the European residents of the city not possessing guns were temporarily provided with arms from the Fort William arsenal. At the same time, in a presentment made by the Grand Jury, it was recommended that the native population of Calcutta should be disarmed and the unrestricted sales of firearms be prohibited.¹⁶⁰ The residents of the ‘white town’ within the centre of the city were relatively few in number and were at times completely isolated from the European counterparts elsewhere, thereby making them exposed to any outburst on the part of a ‘fanatical and infuriated native multitude’.¹⁶¹ Lingering apprehensions of violence and bloodshed forced many of the residents to leave the town for their friends elsewhere in the city. It was thus not without reason that he wrote in utter dismay the following lines, which adequately summarises the popular perceptions of the Europeans residing in Calcutta. Duff wrote:

Delhi was the capital of Mohammedanism, Benares of Hinduism, but
Calcutta is pre-eminently the capital of the British... From all this, it is

¹⁵⁹ Duff, *The Indian Rebellion*: p. 34.

¹⁶⁰ Letter sent from Cecil Beadon, Secretary to the Government of India to H. Holroyd, dated 22 June 1857, Home Department Proceedings Number 1425, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI; also see: “The Disarming Question”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 30 July 1857, in Benoy Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals of 19th Century Bengal*, vol. 4: 1857, *Hindoo Patriot*; *Friend of India*; *Hindu Intelligencer*; *Bengal Hurkaru*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 1979, pp. 134-138.

¹⁶¹ Duff, *The Indian Rebellion*: p. 42. The term ‘White Town’, in nineteenth-century Calcutta denoted the areas around the Fort William that was inhabited by the British and other European officers and residents. However, as Swati Chattopadhyay has argued, colonial ‘black’ and ‘white’ towns were far from autonomous landscapes and that the economic, political and social conditions of colonial culture penetrated the insularity of both, at different levels and to varying degrees. For further details see: Sawti Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta, Modernity, Nationalism and the Colonial Uncanny*, London: Routledge, 2005.

easy to infer, if the actual fall of Delhi, and the all but actual fall of Benares, gave such a shock to the supremacy of the British power, how much more tremendous a shock the actual, or all but actual, fall of Calcutta would give it to it!¹⁶²

It is evident from the statements, such as the one mentioned above, that to Duff and the European inhabitants of the city, the fall of Calcutta at the hands of the rebels of 1857 would have meant the actual fall of the British Empire in India. While the fear and apprehension of the European population was Duff's main concern, *Hindoo Patriot* in a similar effort described the situation of the native inhabitants of Calcutta:

For the native portion of our fellow-townsmen we but crave that the system of terrorism under which they have been kept for the last two weeks may be mitigated to an endurable form. For two weeks, the town has been in a state of siege. Not a soul allowed to enter it from the suburbs a little after evening till daylight, not one to traverse the streets without giving a full account of himself and his purposes. The Mahomedans have been frightened with stories of soldiers being let loose against them, and they are sending away their families to where they conceive safety is to be found.¹⁶³

The situation of the colonial authorities in Calcutta continued to remain the same, if not worse, by the arrival of fresh news of disasters from the Gangetic heartland of India. In a telegraphic despatch dated 2 July 1857, the government in Calcutta received the news of the mutiny of the native regiments in Kanpur, and that, joined by Nana Sahib and his followers, the rebels with several guns and a considerable quantity of ammunition in possession were besieging Wheeler in his entrenchment

¹⁶² Duff, *The Indian Rebellion*: pp. 32-33.

¹⁶³ "The Metropolis and its Safety", *Hindoo Patriot*, 25 June 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals* Vol. IV: pp. 102-103.

and shortly thereafter, with the surrender of Wheeler, Nana Sahib was proclaimed the *Peshwa*.¹⁶⁴ It was further reported that Sir Henry Lawrence was about to be besieged in the residency at Lucknow; while the troops of the Gwalior regiment had mutinied on the 13 June 1857 having attempted a general massacre.¹⁶⁵ On 4 July the authorities in Calcutta heard from Lawrence the massacre at Kanpur and soon after of the defeat of his own force at Chinhhat. Four days later, Lawrence was himself dead, and the Residency of Lucknow was in a state of siege.¹⁶⁶ The situation was indeed alarming for the government in Calcutta since ‘if Cawnpore were indeed gone, the weak middle piece was broken in twain’, and under the situation it would be almost impossible to defend themselves in Calcutta with a handful of English infantry regiments and scanty artillery power.¹⁶⁷ The apprehension, as expressed above in the editorial report of *Hindoo Patriot*, was not unfounded. The administration in Calcutta was haunted by the thin presence of the European soldiers in the city at this time of crisis and was identified as a major source of weakness. A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, in a correspondence dated 22 August 1857 to Cecil Beadon, Secretary to the Government of India, confided that he conceived ‘the present moment to be a war of extermination and that the presence of small bodies of English, is an actual source of weakness, as every defeat of these

¹⁶⁴ “The Rebellion”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 9 July 1857 in Ghose, *Selections* IV: pp. 108-109.

¹⁶⁵ “The Rebellion”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 9 July 1857 in Ghose, *Selections* IV: p. 110.

¹⁶⁶ Maclagan. *Clemency Canning*: p. 108.

¹⁶⁷ “The Rebellion”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 9 July 1857 in Ghose, *Selections* IV: p. 110. Sir Hugh Massy Wheeler was an officer in the Indian army of the East India Company. During the time of the rebellion Wheeler was the Commander of the garrison in Kanpur. Sir Henry Montgomery Lawrence was a British soldier and a statesman in India. In 1856, Lawrence was appointed as the Chief Commissioner of the newly annexed state of Awadh. He was killed during the siege of Lucknow in 1857.

small bodies is counted as a serious setback to the Empire's power and prestige'.¹⁶⁸ Considering that the Bengal presidency contained less than twenty thousand European soldiers, with above ten times that number of Indian troops, and ruling over a race that numbered nearly one hundred millions, a proposal was adopted to enhance the proportions of Europeans in the Bengal army to the level of one European for eleven Indians.¹⁶⁹

From the above discussion we can thus surmise that the panic that had gripped the colonial officials as well as the European inhabitants in Calcutta during this period was not without a reason. It was the cumulative effect of the actual events that were unfolding in the northern India, followed by the unverified reports and rumours coming from various sources to Calcutta that created an atmosphere of terror and panic amongst the residents. The colonial government had to take some serious precautionary steps in order to curb the fear of being massacred by the rebellious sepoys. But, as this section showed, even those preventive measures could not allay themselves of the enduring panic that rattled them throughout this period of crisis. And, as the following section will show, the sequence of events occurring in the neighbouring districts of Calcutta did not help their cause either.

¹⁶⁸ Letter from A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to Cecil Beadon, Secretary to the Government of India, dated 22 August 1857, Judicial Proceedings 978, Number: 24, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁶⁹ Governor-General in Council to the Court of Directors to the East India Company, HCPP, vol. 30, 17 September 1857, BLOC.

2.5 THE NEIGHBOURING DISTRICTS OF CALCUTTA

While the colonial administration as well as the European population of Calcutta was trying to grapple with an atmosphere of panic and fear, the echoes of similar nature were felt in other parts of the lower province of Bengal as well. The Nadia division, lying adjacent to the north of Calcutta, was not exempted from its own peculiar share of anxiety either. The division was affected both directly and indirectly by the general disturbing causes — directly by the presence in the neighbourhood of Calcutta and of Murshidabad of the mutinous sepoys; and indirectly by the constant arrival of large bodies of European troops in Calcutta. It should be noted that it was in this Division that the first symptoms were displayed of the coming mutiny which was soon to destroy the hitherto trusted army of Bengal. In the district of Berhampur, a panic occurred on 23 June 1857, in consequence of the two Regiments at that station that had mutinied. Detachments of Her Majesty's 34th and 35th Regiments were sent to Berhampur, whose progress were greatly assisted by His Highness the Nawab Nazim.¹⁷⁰ At the Presidency, 'seditious placards' containing the rebellious messages were posted up and panic prevailed among the European officials and residents about the large number of arms that were being purchased and concealed in the city by the indigenous residents.¹⁷¹ The government apprehended that the rebel sepoys might get hold of these arms from the indigenous local shopkeepers and residents.¹⁷² As a result, various legislative acts suited to the existing emergencies were passed and different public bodies and private individuals submitted addresses

¹⁷⁰ Special Narrative Number 15, Judicial Department, 15 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁷¹ Judicial Proceedings Number 855, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁷² Judicial Proceedings Number 855, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

of loyalty and good will to the government. In addition to these, a corps of volunteer guards was formed comprising of British and other Europeans in order to check the sales and purchase of unauthorised arms and ammunitions.¹⁷³

The Special Narrative records that a sepoy of the late 37th Native Infantry was detected by a trooper of the 11th Irregular Cavalry.¹⁷⁴ This deserter from the regiment that had mutinied was tried and sentenced to transportation for life. The 63rd Native Infantry division and a greater part of the 11th Irregular Cavalry were also disarmed with the aid of Her Majesty's 90th Foot.¹⁷⁵ The Cavalry exhibited a strong spirit of insubordination and were deprived, in addition, of their horses.¹⁷⁶ There were also reports that the sepoys who had been disarmed, were making enquiries as to the arms procurable in the city as in the event of their being obtained, a portion of them had determined to desert, for which they required arms. On the recommendation of the Commissioner of Police, two light field pieces, with ammunition, were placed in the police compounds.¹⁷⁷ In addition, a force of sixty Europeans was added to the Police for the protection of the City. As an additional measure of precaution, the city itself was disarmed with the aid of the 90th Regiment.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Special Narrative Number 15, Judicial Department 15 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁷⁴ Special Narrative Number 17, Judicial Department 21 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁷⁵ Special Narrative Number 17, Judicial Department 21 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁷⁶ Special Narrative Number 17, Judicial Department 21 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁷⁷ Special Narrative Number 19, Judicial Department 29 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁷⁸ Special Narrative Number 20, Judicial Department 29 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

Likewise in the nearby district of Barasat, an uneasy feeling amongst the Muslim population existed on account of rumours that some violent measures were to be adopted by the colonial officials towards them during their upcoming festival of Muharram. The government too were apprehensive towards the Muslim population of this region on account of the various unverified reports about their impending plan to ‘massacre the European inhabitants’ during the festival. They were supposedly instigated by the ‘mischievous’ Faraizis inhabiting the district.¹⁷⁹ The Joint Magistrate of Barasat also reported to have apprehended certain persons who were allegedly the followers of the deposed Nawab of Awadh.¹⁸⁰ Subsequently, some of them were arrested and were sent to the Alipur Jail. As a precautionary measure, the sepoy stations at the district were detained by the Magistrate and were sent to Barrackpore for court martial.¹⁸¹ In addition the police and the jail guards were also increased in the district. Furthermore in a meeting organised by the ‘Committee for the Preservation of Peace in the district of Barasat’ in the premise of the government school it was resolved that,

...till the total annihilation of the barbarous mutineers, be heard, the service of fifty efficient paiks be secured at the expense of the committee for the protection of the town from the hand of the budmashes, and the Magistrate be humbly prayed to incorporate this body with the police corps.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ The Joint Magistrate of Barasat to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Proceedings Number 678, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA. For further details on the role of the Faraizis during this period, see the chapter: 3 “From Rumour to Reality: Development of the Situation in Eastern Bengal”.

¹⁸⁰ Special Narrative of Events dated 5 December 1857, Further Papers Number 9, Papers related to the Mutinies in East Indies, p. 330, BLOC.

¹⁸¹ *The Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, Friday 19 June 1857.

¹⁸² *The Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, Friday 19 June 1857.

In the district of Purulia, the mutinous disposition of the detachment of the Ramgarh Battalion apprehended the government officials so much so that they had to leave their stations.¹⁸³ The mutinous sepoys took advantage of the situation and plundered the government treasury and committed other outrages. In fact, it is in this district that one of the most prominent instances of the wider connection between the mutinous sepoys and the civil population could be found. In the month of October 1857, it was reported that the Rajah of Pachete, Nilmani Singh Deo, was suspected to be a privy to the rebel bands who had scoured the country and blocked the road to Ragunathpur, the sub-divisional town of Purulia.¹⁸⁴ It should be noted here that Rajah Nilmani Singh possessed extensive zamindari estates in Pachete and probably had a long lineage of ancestors who served as the Rajah of Pachete. It was also alleged that the Nilmani Singh was trying to secretly rope in the tribal population of his estate, especially the Santhals, and inciting them to rebel against the colonial government.¹⁸⁵ In his letter written to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Frederick James Halliday, the Rajah allegedly claimed that he was given the title of ‘Maharajah Bahadur’ of Pachete which was later ordered by the government to desist and when he protested this, he was insulted in front of his own people by the Assistant Commissioner, Captain George Oakes.¹⁸⁶ The district officials reported that the Rajah had not only refused assistance to the government to suppress the present

¹⁸³ Judicial Proceedings Number 954, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁸⁴ Judicial Proceedings Number 328, 1 October 1857, Government of Bengal. WBSA; Judicial Proceedings Number 338, 8 October 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁸⁵ Judicial Proceedings Number 338, 8 October 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁸⁶ HCPP, Further Papers (Number 9 in continuation of Number 7), Enclosure 40 in Number 1, Insurrection in the East Indies, Presented to both the Houses of Parliament, 1858, p. 90, BLOC.

disorder, he was in fact trying to instigate the rebel sepoys and had a large amount of gunpowder and other ammunitions.

As a consequence the colonial government thought it prudent to keep the Rajah under close surveillance and issued orders to arrest him. However, when the Company army reached Raghunathpur to arrest him, they had to face resistance from the local populace. The Rajah was supposedly staying in a camp near Raghunathpur. E.H. Lushington, the officiating Commissioner, and Colonel Forster with a wing of the Sheikhawati battalion was able to arrest the Rajah from his camp only when the latter realised that he had no other option but to give up.¹⁸⁷ The following morning, the Principal Assistant Commissioner, Captain Davis, Colonel Forster and his detachment along with arrested Nilmani Singh proceeded to Pachete where the latter's house was searched and military stores and arms of various descriptions were found.¹⁸⁸ The Rajah was subsequently arrested and was detained in Calcutta until March 1858. A case was made out by the government that the position of Nilmani Singh was similar to that of the Rani of Tikari of Bihar and so he was entitled to the same treatment.¹⁸⁹ Nilmani Singh was tried under Act XIV of 1857 on the charge of rebellion against the state and was acquitted on 21 May 1858.¹⁹⁰ However, he was

¹⁸⁷ Letter Number 12 November 1857, Number 13, Home Public Proceedings, 20 November 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 188-89; Forwarded papers containing the proceedings of the Commissioner of Burdwan deputed to Pachete to the house of Neelmoney Singh Deo. Letter Number 12 November 1857, Number 13, Home Public Proceedings, 20 November 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 188-90, 405, NAI.

¹⁹⁰ OIOC, Board's Collection, no. 191546, "Revolt of the Native Army: Measures Adopted for the Punishment of Mutineers, Deserters and Rebels", dated 1 December 1857. As an example I am quoting a section from this document: "By Act No XIV of 1857 all heinous offences committed in any district to which this Act might be extended were made punishable by death, transportation or imprisonment and by forfeiture of all property and effects... These enormous powers... have been

kept in custody as a state prisoner under Regulation III of 1818 as the Lieutenant Governor thought it imprudent to set him free at a time when the adjacent Singhbhum district was still in open rebellion.

TABLE 4
ARMS AND AMMUNITION FOUND WITHIN THE PREMISES OF NILMANI SINGH DEO
OF PACHETE¹⁹¹

- ❖ Several earthen pots, sieves, &c., and materials for making powder, with powder in several stages of preparation.
- ❖ Gunpowder, in quantity about 7 maunds.
- ❖ Sulphur, in quantity of about 2 maunds.
- ❖ Saltpetre, in quantity about 3 maunds.
- ❖ Grape, in quantity about 1 maunds.
- ❖ A box of canister.
- ❖ A few large balls, for cannon.
- ❖ Several hundred bullets, of sizes.
- ❖ 4 cannons.
- ❖ 17 swords, small and large.
- ❖ 32 matchlocks, small and large.
- ❖ pistols.
- ❖ spears.
- ❖ 11 ammunition pouches, complete.
- ❖ A bag of flints, for muskets.
- ❖ 15 matchlock-moulds.
- ❖ English rifles.

E.H. Lushington, Officiating Commissioner of Burdwan to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Camp Raghunathpur, 9 November 1857.

extended not to Military Officers only but to Civil Officers and trustworthy persons not connected with the government who under Martial Law properly so called would have had no authority."

¹⁹¹ HCPP, Further Papers (No. 9) in continuation of No. 7, relative to the Insurrection in the East Indies, Enclosure 446-47 in No. 1, 1858, pp. 188-89. BLOC.

It is therefore quite obvious from the present section that not only the outbreak of events of different multitude in the north-central Gangetic heartland along with the inflow of various sorts of rumours and unverified reports that kept the colonial government in Calcutta alarmed of their own situation in the seat of their empire. Even in the adjoining districts of Calcutta, situations were not favourable for the administration. There were clear instances of outbreaks of rebellion of the sepoys of various cantonments, coupled with the discreet cooperation of the local population and the landlords in some districts, and their linkages with the rebels of northern India. Worse still, under the prevailing situation rumours and reports of various kinds that were already in circulation added fuel to the fire. As a result the government had to take recourse to strong precautionary measures in order to keep the situation under control. Yet the government could not allay themselves and the European inhabitants of the city from the fear of being exterminated by the rebels. This becomes apparent from the following section which examines the alarming rate of the sale of firearms and weapons of various kinds in the city in this period and the response of the colonial government in this regard.

2.6 THE SALE OF FIREARMS IN AND AROUND CALCUTTA

As a consequence of these developments in and around the city of Calcutta, the price of guns reached its height in and around the city of Calcutta during this period of crisis. The colonial officials as well as the European residents of Calcutta were gripped with fear, indiscipline and helplessness. Rumours and reports coming from across the different corners of the city terrified and threatened the day-to-day life of

the European inhabitants of the city. Many Englishmen and the indigenous Christians residing in the city were anxious to possess guns for their own defence. The ‘Firangis’ of Kasaitala, Chunogalli, and Chowringhee who had never ever imagined themselves with firearms of any kind, were now seen practicing shooting, in case of an emergency. The officiating Commissioner of Police of the time S. Wanchope, appealed to the Government of Bengal that no one should be allowed to possess arms without prior government sanctions.¹⁹² Those who were found in the streets of Calcutta without a proper authorisation to carry arms ought to be disarmed by the police and the volunteer guards, under the Military Act of XIII of 1856.¹⁹³ In fact, the Commissioner of Police was even thinking in terms of issuing a notice to this effect, but hesitated as his apprehension was that such measures might bring the police in direct opposition with the armed Europeans in and around Calcutta.¹⁹⁴ However, he strongly recommended calling in all the arms that had already been distributed from the arsenals.

Accordingly, on 25 June 1857, S. Wanchope, the Officiating Commissioner of Police issued a notification whereby the police were instructed to ‘disarm all persons, Europeans and Native, found armed in the streets of Calcutta, with the exception of

¹⁹² The Officiating Commissioner of Police to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Fort William, 24 June, 1857, Number 430, Enclosure 763 in Number 1, Papers related to the Mutinies in East Indies presented to both Houses of Parliament by Her Majesty 1857, BLOC.

¹⁹³ Letter sent from the Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of India dated 23 June 1857, Enclosure 246 in Number 1, Papers relative to the Mutinies in East Indies presented to both Houses of the Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, Further papers Number 9 in continuation with Number 7, 1857, p. 101, BLOC.

¹⁹⁴ The Officiating Commissioner of Police to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Fort William, 24 June, 1857, Number 430, Enclosure 763 in Number 1, Papers related to the Mutinies in East Indies presented to both Houses of Parliament by Her Majesty 1857, BLOC.

those authorised by the government, or the Commissioner of Police, to wear arms.’¹⁹⁵ The patrols of the Calcutta Volunteer Guards too received the similar instructions.¹⁹⁶ A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, under the instructions from F.J. Halliday, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, requested the officiating Commissioner of Police in Calcutta and the Magistrate of the 24 Parganas to make an enquiry regarding the possession of arms within their jurisdiction, and check whether there had been any noticeable sale of firearms to the population under ‘suspicious’ circumstances. The Commissioner of Police reported the sale of several thousand muskets and brass guns of large calibre in Moorghyhatta, where most of the indigenous gun-makers of Calcutta resided.¹⁹⁷ He also mentioned an individual named Hurrish Chunder Bose, who had in his premise more than six thousands old guns and pistol barrels, and a number of spears which he had apparently purchased from the government arsenals as old and scrap iron. Although most of these arms were damaged and of no use, the government, under the present circumstances, expressed concerns since many of these arms could be repaired and reused by the disbanded soldiers and their associates in case they get hold of them.¹⁹⁸

Reports were already pouring down from the north of India that the disbanded sepoys were on their way to Bengal and that many of them were already in and

¹⁹⁵ Notification by S. Wanchope, Officiating Commissioner of Police Calcutta, 24 June 1857, Enclosure 764 in Number 1, Papers relative to the Mutinies in East Indies presented to both Houses of the Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1857, p. 309, BLOC.

¹⁹⁶ Notification by S. Wanchope, Officiating Commissioner of Police Calcutta, 24 June 1857, Enclosure 764 in Number 1, Papers relative to the Mutinies in East Indies presented to both Houses of the Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1857, p. 309, BLOC.

¹⁹⁷ Letter sent from the Commissioner of Police to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 28 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 538, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁹⁸ Letter sent from the Commissioner of Police to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 28 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 538, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

around Calcutta, waiting for the right opportunity to strike. The government officials in Calcutta issued orders to destroy all of these arms under the supervision of the Inspectors and to take possession of the spears and other smaller arms.¹⁹⁹ In fact, on 25 July 1857, in a presentment made by the Grand Jury, the Supreme Court recommended that the Indian population of Calcutta and its suburbs should be disarmed and that the unrestricted sale of arms and ammunitions should be prohibited with immediate effect.²⁰⁰ The Commissioner of Police in Calcutta and the Magistrates of the suburbs were asked to keep a close watch on the sale of arms in the bazar and to prevent the dealers from selling these arms to any person whom the government suspected of having rebellious tendencies.²⁰¹ But, in spite of the trying efforts on the part of the government to stop the sale of fire-arms, the trade continued at a brisk pace. In a detailed report presented to the Town Major, the Commanding Officer of the Calcutta Native Militia, Major C. Herbert, expressed his grave concerns regarding the continuing unrestricted and indiscriminate sale of fire-arms in the city and its vicinity.²⁰² His investigation in the bazar of Murgihatta revealed the enormous amount of guns and pistols of various descriptions that were being sold and purchased by a large number of people. This was accompanied by some inconclusive reports that the whole of the Indian population was actually armed with firearms, and that, he believed, stores of such kind were hidden in different localities all around the city.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ “The Disarming Question”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 25 July 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 134.

²⁰⁰ Judicial Proceedings Number 1420, 25 July 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

²⁰¹ Judicial Proceedings Number 1420, 25 July 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

²⁰² Judicial Proceedings Number 242, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

²⁰³ Judicial Proceedings Number 242, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

Under the circumstances, in order to control the unrestricted sale of arms in the city, the Legislative Council of India thus promulgated the Act XXVIII of 1857 on 11 September 1857.²⁰⁴ Under this act the Magistrates or other Officers, as specified by the Executive Government, were directed to send in writing the details of ‘the fire-arms, bayonet, sword, spear-head, or any other weapon which shall be on his premises in the possession of any of his retainers or servants.’²⁰⁵ The Magistrates were empowered to seize any such unaccounted arms or ammunitions that were to be found around the city and detain in safe custody for such time as may be deemed necessary by the government. Furthermore, according to this act, any people who were to be found carrying arms, had to produce a certificate issued by the Magistrate or other officer authorised, failing which he would be disarmed by any Magistrate, Deputy-Magistrate or by an European Commissioned Officer in the service of the government.²⁰⁶ However, the above mentioned provisions were not applied to the officers, soldiers and sailors in the Military or Naval Service of the East India Company in respect of arms and ammunition kept by them for the use in the public service. Even the members of the Volunteer Corps were exempted from the restrictions to carry arms. This was significant as the formation of the Volunteer Corps was already subjected to immense criticism from the civil population of the city who had to bear the hostility and rudeness from the members of the Volunteer

²⁰⁴ Act XXVIII of 1857 Passed by the Legislative Council of India, “An Act relating to the Importation, manufacture, and Sale of Arms and Ammunition, and for regulating the right to keep or use the same,” 11 September 1857, Enclosure 1 in Number 11, Papers Related to the Mutinies in East Indies presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1857, pp. 300-05, BLOC.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., BLOC.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., BLOC.

Guards.²⁰⁷ In a way this act superseded the previous notification issued by the Officiating Commissioner of Police in Calcutta according to which the Volunteer Guards too were prohibited from carrying arms.

Similar restrictions were also issued to all the shops in and around Calcutta that dealt with arms and ammunitions. The government declared that if any person manufactured, repaired, sold or kept arms or ammunitions without a license to do so, they would be liable to be convicted by the Magistrate.²⁰⁸ As a penalty he would be charged five hundred rupees in addition to pay to the government double the amount of the value of the arms or ammunition sold by him. Also, all the arms and ammunition belonging to the offender would be forfeited if the Magistrate so desired.²⁰⁹ Every shopkeeper or manufacturers were instructed by the government to enter in a book an account of all the stock-in-trade and the details of every purchaser of arms and ammunitions from him. Such books were to be open at all times to inspection by the Magistrate or other duly authorised officer, failing which the license of the guilty person would be revoked.²¹⁰ The Magistrates were also authorised to inspect at any time the premises in which the arms and ammunitions were manufactured or kept by the licensed dealer.

²⁰⁷ Letter from The Officiating Commissioner of Police Calcutta to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 24 June 1857 , Judicial Proceedings, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

²⁰⁸ Act XXVIII of 1857 passed by the Legislative Council of India, *ibid.*, p. 301.

²⁰⁹ Letter from The Officiating Commissioner of Police Calcutta to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 24 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

²¹⁰ Letter from The Officiating Commissioner of Police Calcutta to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 24 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

However the point that the government missed out, thereby making their own and the European residents' situation further complicated in the Calcutta and its neighbouring areas, was that most of these fire arms that were being sold by the various local dealers in and around Calcutta were mostly to European concerns and the majority of the buyers were actually the Christian inhabitants of the city.²¹¹ In fact, if one were to make an investigation in all the Christian households of the city and its vicinity, every such household would have at least one pistol or musket in their possession considering the exigency of the situation. Quite expectedly therefore there were instant protests from amongst the European inhabitants of the city against some of the clauses of the 'Arms Act'. Although they appreciated the Act as a welcome relief for them in the sense that this would 'enable the Government to take arms out of the hands of disaffected and dangerous persons', but at the same time they were equally apprehensive about the fact that the 'proposed power [given] to the Magistrate, or Commissioner of Police may endanger the public peace.'²¹² These Magistrates or Officials, according to the European inhabitants residing in and around the Calcutta, might be acting 'under the influence of panic, prejudice, or error' thereby leaving all the Christian inhabitants within his district wholly defenceless.²¹³ It was their strong conviction considering the recent proceedings in the city of Calcutta, that the threats were definitely potent and thus under the

²¹¹ Letter from the Office of the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 23 July 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 40, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

²¹² Enclosure 7 in Number 11, Appendix (B) to the Papers Relative to the Mutinies in East Indies presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1857, p. 309, BLOC.

²¹³ Ibid., BLOC.

circumstances ‘such powers cannot be safely entrusted to all the officials’.²¹⁴ Extending such an Act to the Christian inhabitants of the city ‘will be to oppress and irritate the loyal, while it will be wholly ineffectual as regards the disaffected, who will neither register nor expose their arms till the moment for using them shall have arrived.’²¹⁵ One needs to keep in mind in this context that these firearms, many of which were imported from Europe, had to go through the Customs House before they were actually delivered to different buyers. Under the present circumstances, these dealers were now concerned that the government might actually confiscate their stock of firearms or seal their establishment. As a result, they tried their best to sell off their products as quickly as possible. It was this unusual circumstance under which the sale of arms went high during this period in Calcutta and made the European and indigenous population as well as the colonial government extremely concerned.

2.7 TRANSGRESSING THE BOUNDARIES: PANIC AND FEAR IN THE STRAITS

SETTLEMENTS

Before concluding this chapter and moving on to the next, one might pause here briefly to note that the prevailing panic amongst the Europeans – both civil and administrative – had a much larger impact, which transcended the regional/national boundaries and reached far and beyond, making this epoch event almost a global in

²¹⁴ “Petition of the Christian Inhabitants of Calcutta, on behalf of themselves and of all other Christian Inhabitants of the Presidency”, Enclosure 7 in Number 11, Appendix (B) to the Papers Relative to the Mutinies in East Indies presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty 1857, p. 309, BLOC.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 310, BLOC.

character. In fact the global aspect of the rebellion of 1857, as Crispin Bates has pointed out, remains inadequately explored, despite several promising initiatives.²¹⁶ However the recent contributions by the historians working on this aspect has brought out some fascinating dimensions, which promises to yield rich dividend in terms of understanding the impact of this watershed event in a global scale.²¹⁷ Based on these researches, a brief albeit an interesting comparison may be drawn of the fear and panic that had gripped the European population in Calcutta, and in the regions located in the distant colonies of the British Empire.

As the rebellion was gradually unfolding, within a few weeks the British officials in India began to consider the fate of the disarmed and disbanded sepoys, particularly those who had shown no inclination to join the mutnieers. One of the suggestions proposed by Neville Warren (Agent of Sindh railways) and supported by Lord Elphinstone (Governor of Bombay) and others was that the disbanded sepoys should be transported to various other colonies of the British Empire and use them as potential labourers.²¹⁸ Suggestions for sites where convict-rebels could be used favourably included British Guiana, the Cape, the Kooria Moorria islands, the north coast of Australia, Perim and the West Indies. While doing so what was not considered by the colonial officials was how the prospect of importing the mutnieers would be received by the residents of these colonies. To cite one example out of many, in the Straits Settlements, which had already received many Indian convicts,

²¹⁶ Crispin Bates and Marina Carter, "Empire and Locality: A Global Dimension to the 1857 Indian Uprising", *Journal of Global History*, 5: 1, 2010, pp. 51-73, p. 53.

²¹⁷ For the recent contributions on the global dimension of the rebellion of 1857, see: Marina Carter and Crispin Bates (eds.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, vol: 3 Global Perspectives, New Delhi; London: Sage Publications, 2013; Shaswati Mazumdar (ed.), *Insurgent Sepoys: Europe Views the Revolt of 1857*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2011.

²¹⁸ Bates and Carter, "Empire and Locality": pp. 55-56.

residents raised strong apprehensions about importing any mutineers.²¹⁹ Initial reports of tensions in the native militia in India were already published by *The Straits Times* in Singapore as early as March 1857, which noted the disturbances in Barrackpore on the issue of the manufacture of greased cartridges causing considerable consternation amongst the native sepoys regarding the forcible conversions.²²⁰

Although the European inhabitants in the Straits Settlements initially did not pay much heed to these initial reports amongst the European inhabitants in the Straits Settlements, by the summer of 1857 reports began to pour in, describing the horrors of the European population in India. The global communication system, consisting primarily of steamship mail services and complemented by a nascent telegraphic network, enabled the regular circulation of news of the major events across the English-speaking world.²²¹ The arrival of the steamships carrying the

²¹⁹ Bates and Carter, "Empire and Locality": p. 61. The Straits Settlements was the name by which Singapore and adjacent territories like Penang / Prince of Wales Island – in present day Malaysia – were then known.

²²⁰ *The Straits Times*, 10 March 1857, quoted in Rajesh Rai, "The 1857 Panic and the Fabrication of an Indian 'Menace' in Singapore", *Modern Asian Studies*, 47, no. 2, 2013, pp. 365-405: p. 390. *The Straits Times* was edited by an English journalist named Robert Carr Woods who had spent five years in Bombay. The newspaper provides valuable source of information because in addition to publishing reports and government notices, it often reproduced official correspondences and documents. The newspaper functioned as the 'voice' of the sentiments of the elites, non-official European inhabitants in Singapore. From the mid-1850's the newspaper increasingly articulated views which dissented from those of the government. The paper firmly backed the public meetings of European inhabitants and published their resolutions that also included rumours circulating within the community. For further details see: C.M. Turnbull, *Dateline Singapore: 150 years of the Straits Times*, Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, 1995.

²²¹ Peter Putnis, "International Press and the Indian Uprising", in Marina Carter and Crispin Bates (eds.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, vol: 3 Global Perspectives, New Delhi; London: Sage Publications, 2013, pp. 1-17, 15.

transported convicts and other Indians, along with the newspapers and documents, informed of the spread of the rebellion in northern India and in the lower province of Bengal. The news of the rebellion and panic amongst the European population in Calcutta and elsewhere were published in *The Straits Times*:

From Calcutta we have frightful news...several Native regiments have revolted and murdered all their officers. The City of Delhi has been captured and nearly every European killed, under most atrocious and revolting circumstances, and not sparing age or sex. Meerut also had fallen; even Calcutta itself was in great peril...²²²

The fear and apprehension amongst the European population in the Straits Settlements worsened when the news of the massacre at Kanpur reached on 30 July 1857 via Calcutta and was published by *The Straits Times* the very same day: 'Cawnpore is fallen! Sir Hugh Wheeler killed, and every European soul, the number exceeding six hundred women and children, inclusive of 200 of our bravest Soldiers'.²²³ As a consequence the European inhabitants apprehended the possibility of a similar uprising among the existing 3000 strong Indian convict population in the Straits Settlement.²²⁴ To make the situation further complicated, the authorities in India, unaware of the panic amongst the Europeans in Singapore, called on the Straits Settlements to take in the most dangerous criminals from India, i.e. those sentenced to more than three years imprisonment, to alleviate the overcrowded conditions of Indian jails.²²⁵ In order to voice their opinion the European residents drew up a

²²² *The Straits Times Extra*, 31 May 1857, p. 1.

²²³ *The Straits Times*, 30 July 1857, p. 1.

²²⁴ Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857-8*: p. 108.

²²⁵ Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857-8*: p. 110.

memorandum expressing their deep anxiety and alarm at the arrival of more such convicts.²²⁶ As precautionary measures in case of emergency, the residents suggested that the Europeans should replace the Indian militia at the arsenals and guns on Pearls and Government Hills – these being the most strategic military locations at the Starits Settlements – and European guards be used to supplement the sepoy lines. The appeal also called for European seamen and sailors to be provided with arms and ammunition; that immediate efforts be taken to engage Malays as policemen ‘substituting them for Natives of India’; and finally to designate ‘a place of refuge for (European) women and children’.²²⁷

The Governor of the Straits Settlements, E.A. Blundell, attempted to reassure the European inhabitants that the apprehensions were groundless, and that every precautionary measures was taken to put down any disturbances with a strong hand. In order to alleviate the fear amongst the residents, the Governor sought to move as many Indian convicts as possible to the area outside town, calling on the municipal committee to use free labour instead of the services of ‘convict scavengers’.²²⁸ But in spite of the efforts undertaken by the European population and the colonial administration in the Straits Settlements, fear and apprehension continued to prevail. This was exacerbated by the ‘the discovery that Khurruck Singh, a Sikh political prisoner (then on parole), was engaged in treasonable correspondence with the convicts’, who, the local press noted, were ‘mostly natives of Bengal, akin to the wretches belonging to the Sepoy regiments, whose barbarities have shocked the

²²⁶ Bates and Carter, “Empire and Locality”: p. 62.

²²⁷ Rai, “The 1857 Panic and the Fabrication of an Indian ‘Menace’ in Singapore”, pp. 393-94.

²²⁸ Rai, “The 1857 Panic and the Fabrication of an Indian ‘Menace’ in Singapore”, p. 397.

whole civilised world'.²²⁹ European inhabitants were concerned that Khurruck would influence a revolt amongst the large body of convicts stationed at the fort that housed the main guns defending the settlement. The apprehension was further intensified when a drunken Indian sepoy entered the residence of a European officer, threatening to massacre all Europeans in the settlement.²³⁰ In order to thwart the impending rebellion, an urgent meeting of the European population, followed by a deputation of fifty Europeans, pleaded the colonial officials to replace the native Indian troops with European-only militia at the Fort Cornwallis, where Khurruck Singh was then prisoned. Although the alarm proved to be false at the end, the fear and anxiety amongst the European community continued to prevail for the next few months. A series of demonstrations and public meetings were held by the European community in the Straits Settlements protesting against this settlement being any longer used for penal purposes, except for its own convicts. The Singapore merchant community went a step further and sent a petition to the parliament, asking for their separation from India and future direct rule from London.²³¹ Eventually, on 23 December 1857, the Governor-General of India decided to prohibit further transportation of mutineers, deserters and rebels to the Straits Settlements, informing that a new penal settlement in the Andamans was under consideration.²³² The transfer of the Straits Settlements to the colonial office was completed in 1867.

From the above discussion, one can safely surmise that the fear and panic which had gripped the European population in Calcutta did not remain confined to the region, but had its impact even in the regions that were otherwise far away from

²²⁹ Bates and Carter, "Empire and Locality": p. 61.

²³⁰ Rai, "The 1857 Panic and the Fabrication of an Indian 'Menace' in Singapore": p. 400.

²³¹ Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857-8*: p. 108.

²³² Cited in Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857-8*: p. 114.

the epicentre of the rebellion of 1857. The stark similarity is noticeable with which rumours (both verified and unverified) and the news of the events travelled and gripped the European population in the Straits Settlements with fear and apprehension, as much as it did to their fellow residents in Calcutta. Parallel may also be drawn the way the residents in the Straits Settlements responded to the crisis. Similar to the residents in Calcutta, who had lost the confidence in the official force to secure their lives, the European inhabitants in the Straits too decided to form armed volunteers and pleaded to replace the Indian militia with Europeans, showing a complete lack of faith and trust towards the native Indians.

2.8 CONCLUSION

Contrary to the established understanding of 1857, it becomes quite evident from the present discussion that there was considerable commotion in the capital city of the British Empire and its neighbouring regions during this period. The cumulative effect of the outbreak of events during the course of the rebellion in the Gangetic heartland, followed by the circulation of rumours of various kinds, had put the colonial administration in Calcutta, the European and the Christian inhabitants as well as the native population of the city in a highly restive and panic-stricken situation throughout the course of the year. This was further complicated by the occurrence of various incidents within the city, interconnected with the events unfolding in the Gangetic heartland of India, which did not help their cause either. As we have observed from the chapter, the circulation of rumours played a crucial part in shaping the course of the events of the rebellion right from its very inception. This also points out the fact that when placed in a specific context rumours could play as significant a

role as the outburst of actual events. This is evident from the response of the colonial administration before and after the open act of rebellion by Mangal Pandey. The government was hesitant regarding the authenticity of some of these reports and reluctant to take appropriate measures before the rebellion broke out. But interestingly, it was the same officials who were visibly concerned and often exaggerated these similar reports once the rebellion had commenced. This difference of perception regarding the authenticity of rumours on the part of the colonial government was shaped by the context in which these rumours were based. It was this context, coupled with the series of incidents and reports that caused serious consternation amongst the officials and European inhabitants of Calcutta. This was augmented by the occurrence of events of different multitude in the neighbouring districts of the city. As a consequence the colonial government had to take every precautionary measure they could perceive of in order to protect not only the city from falling in hands to the mutineers but more importantly to prevent the actual fall of their Empire. And yet they could not allay themselves from the fear and panic of the uprising of 1857. On the contrary these steps often created further complications for them as well as for the inhabitants of the city. Furthermore, drawing a parallel to the situation in the Straits Settlements, the chapter showed that the fear of being overrun by the mutineers was not confined to the capital of the British Empire or its neighbouring provinces, but pervaded far and beyond the regional/national boundaries.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM RUMOUR TO REALITY: DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITUATION IN EASTERN BENGAL

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The last chapter analysed the impact of rumour and panic among the civil population and the colonial government in Calcutta and its vicinity. Calcutta, being the capital of the British Empire in 1857, was crucial to colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent. As a result, the government left no stone unturned in order to secure the city of Calcutta and its immediate neighbourhood from the cumulative effect of the rumours and panic following the events of 1857. And yet, in spite of the radical and extreme measures, colonial officials could not allay the fear that developed in their own midst nor in themselves or the native population – a fear that was persistent albeit in varying intensity, throughout the period under review. The open acts of rebellion in and around the city by the rebel sepoys were limited in scale and outcome because of the timely interception on the part of the colonial government. However, the various ‘seditious plots’ that were being planned and subsequently discovered by the officials in and around Calcutta, the continuous reports of acts of open rebellion in the northern and central India, and their possible connections with the rebel leaders and sepoys around Calcutta created insecurity and undermined the stability of the area.

The present chapter moves towards the region east of Calcutta, what is known today as Bangladesh. This chapter shows the situation and the nature and character of

the uprising in the eastern part of the lower province of the Bengal Presidency, the principal actors and the dominant social groups that were involved, the extent of the connections that the rebels were able to establish with the other nearby regions, and the degree to which these events were connected with the events unfolding in the central Gangetic heartland. Unlike the situation in Calcutta and her neighbourhood this chapter will show that the resultant effect of rumours, panic and even ‘conspiracies’ led to actual acts of open rebellion of a more serious nature in this region. In this context the chapter also seeks to examine the response of the colonial state. The colonial government was at a complete loss with regards to the development of the situation and the movements and intentions of the mutineers in the region. In spite of all their precautionary measures and information and intelligence gathering, the government could not check the outburst of the rebellion and its fall-out effects in the nearby regions as well.

3.2. POLITICAL SITUATION ON THE EVE OF THE OUTBREAK OF THE REBELLION

The first century of colonial rule in India witnessed a dramatic shift in Muslim political fortunes. While some Muslims profited by collaboration, colonial policies devastated many families, both the aristocratic and the salaried.¹ Their predicament was especially grim in Bengal. Eastern Bengal had a predominant Muslim presence throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Battle of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764) had put an end to the rule of the Muslims in Bengal. This decline of the political authority of the Mughals led to a decline of the positions of the Muslims in

¹ Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 117.

the region in general. The introduction of Permanent Settlement in 1793, application of Resumption Laws on rent-free grants, abolition of Persian as the language of the court and the administration, introduction of English as the medium of instruction and enforcement of new rules for recruitment to the government posts adversely affected the position of the Muslims and accelerated the process of their decline.²

Eastern Bengal was already in a volatile state even in the years prior to the outbreak of the rebellion in 1857. This region had a sizeable Muslim population and the continuous presence of Wahabis and Faraizis in the region created considerable alarm among the colonial administration. There was of course a common belief among many officials that the whole Muslim community was implicated in the rebellion, a conviction that was furthered strengthened by the publication of William Hunter's damaging treatise *The Indian Mussalman* in 1871.³ From the British perspective, as Bayly pointed out, the most dangerous networks of sedition 'were the ones maintained by Muslims of the purist Tarikh-i-Muhamadiyya (Wahabi) tendency'.⁴ Although these movements were not widespread all across the lower province of the Bengal presidency, their influence over this region was considerable.

² Amalendu De, "The Social Thoughts and Consciousness of the Bengali Muslims in the Colonial Period," *Social Scientist*, 23, no. 4/6, 1995: 16-37.

³ Seema Alavi, "Mutiny, Deportation and the Nation: Maulana Jafer Thaneshri as a Convict", in Marina Carter and Crispin Bates (eds.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume 3: Global Perspectives, London: Sage Publications, 2013, pp. 188-215: 208; Sir William Wilson Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, 3rd ed., London: Trübner and Company, 1876. As Crispin Bates and Marina Carter have pointed out, Hunter's report, which was largely based on his encounters with Wahabis in the peasant areas of eastern Bengal, exaggerated and demonised the influence of conservative Wahabi Islam throughout India. Crispin Bates and Marina Carter, "Religion and Retribution in the Indian Rebellion of 1857", *Leidschrift. Empire and Resistance. Religious Beliefs versus the Ruling Power*, 24-1, (2009), pp. 51-68: 65.

⁴ C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 320.

The chief aim of the Wahabi movement was to purge all non-Shariati elements from the practices of the Muslims in order to regain Islam's glorious past.⁵ According to the Wahabi doctrine as set out by Sayyid Ahmad, under the colonial rule India had turned into 'Dar-ul-Harb', i.e., a land of war ruled by the non-believers of Islam.⁶ The Muslims of the country, therefore, should once again pledge to follow strictly the instructions prescribed in the Holy Quran and the Hadith and wage a 'Jihad' against the 'Kafir' rulers, i.e., the British, and once again re-establish the 'Dar-ul-Islam', i.e., the rule of believers, in India.⁷ It might be interesting to note in this context, as Ayesha Jalal has pointed out in a recent study of the concept of 'Jihad' in south Asia, that many moderate Muslims in the nineteenth-century insisted that a fatwa describing India as 'Dar-ul-Harb' did not amount to a call for 'Jihad' and that a 'Jihad' itself need not necessarily involve armed struggle.⁸ Those categorised as 'Wahabis' included the great Muslim reformer Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the poet Hakim Momin Khan Momin, although they did not participate directly in the Wahabi movement.⁹ In fact, after the 'Wahabi trials' (1863-1873) the followers made a submission to the colonial government pleading that they be referred to as the 'Ahl-i-

⁵ Atis Dasgupta, "Titu Meer's Rebellion: A Profile," *Social Scientist*, 11, no. 10, 1983: 39-48, pp. 40-41.

⁶ Dar-al-Harb: Territory of war. Denotes the territories bordering on dar al-Islam (territory of Islam), whose leaders are called upon to convert to Islam. Refers to territory that does not have a treaty of nonaggression or peace with Muslims. When the leaders of dar al-harb accept Islam, the territory becomes part of dar al-Islam, where Islamic law prevails; conversely, according to the majority of jurists an Islamic territory taken by non-Muslims becomes dar al-harb when Islamic law is replaced. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e490>

⁷ Dasgupta, "Titu Meer's Rebellion", p. 41.

⁸ Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah*: pp. 115-116.

⁹ Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 4; Also see, Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *The Wahabi Movement in India*, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1966, p. 14.

Hadith' (followers of the Prophet's word).¹⁰ A spate of 'fatwas' even questioned the validity of a 'jihad' arguing that so long as Muslims were allowed to practice their religious rituals without hindrance as protected people (*mustamin*), India was 'Dar-ul-Aman' (abode of peace).¹¹

The Wahabi movement in Bengal was led by the peasant leader Mir Nasir Ali, popularly known as Titu Mir (1782-1831). Although not a village aristocrat, Titu Mir was 'above the class of ordinary villagers'.¹² In his early life Titu Mir used to work under a local zamindar but was arrested in a case. Soon after his release he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca where he met Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly, the other prominent leader of the Wahabi movement in India, who made a lasting impression on Titu Mir.¹³ On returning to his district around 1821 Titu Mir was able to form a mass base with the help of poor Muslim peasants of the area. His call for a refusal to pay unjust taxes to the government and local zamindars were readily responded to by many. Quite understandably the landed elites, which included Hindus as well as the Muslims alike, and even the Mollahs, reacted sharply against the Wahabi preaching from the very beginning and tried to persuade the colonial government to take

¹⁰ Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*: p. 27. Also, see: Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan (ed.), *Selections from Bengal Government Records on Wahabi Trials (1863-70)*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961. Ahl-i-Hadith: Initially a strictly religious movement founded in northern India in the mid-nineteenth century. It advocated radical religious reform, rejecting everything introduced into Islam after the earliest times, that is to say after the Quran, the Sunna and the Hadith, from which it derived its name. In practice it does not greatly differ from Saudi Wahabism. Antoine Sfeir (ed.), *The Columbia World Dictionary of Islamism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 27.

¹¹ Jalal, *Partisans of Allah*: p. 115.

¹² Azizur Rahman Mallick, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal, 1757-1856. A Study of the Development of the Muslims in Bengal, with Special Reference to Their Education*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961, p. 76.

¹³ Jalal, *Partisans of Allah*: p. 137.

appropriate actions.¹⁴ Titu Mir was also beginning to realise the fact that the time was opportune to change the character of the movement, from socio-religious to politico-economic, and put up a strong and united resistance against the oppressions of the landed elites and the European planters. On October 1830, Titu Mir declared that the period of British rule had expired and all the zamindars and talukdars of the locality should henceforth remit revenues to him and not to the British treasury. In addition, the ryats were asked not to pay rents to the zamindars who were opposing the movement.¹⁵ Also, as Sugata Bose has mentioned, in a bold act of inversion, Titu Mir declared himself the representative of the Muslim sovereignty of India and appointed his nephew as the commander of his forces.¹⁶ At the initial stages the colonial government did not take the matter seriously. But the subsequent attacks on the factories of the European Indigo planters by the Wahabi activists during the year 1830-31 made them realise that the Wahabis were trying to 'paralyse the civil power'.¹⁷ In fact, by the beginning of November 1830, the situation deteriorated beyond the control of the local authorities: 'from 8th to 15th of the month they (the rebels) remained gradually increasing in numbers and confidence, acting in short in open contempt of all authority'.¹⁸ Titu Mir and his band of followers successfully repulsed a number of armed offensives launched by the local colonial authorities, along with the zamindars and indigo planters for about a year. But by November 1831, the authorities realised that the massive support-base of Titu Mir made it

¹⁴ Dasgupta, "Titu Meer's Rebellion", p. 41.

¹⁵ Judicial Proceedings (Criminal) Number 11, 5 August 1833, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁶ Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770*, vol. 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 149.

¹⁷ Judicial Proceedings Number 85, 22 November 1831, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁸ Judicial Proceedings (Criminal) Number 5, 4 April 1832, Government of Bengal, NAI.

virtually impossible for them to succeed.¹⁹ Alarmed by the rapid success of the activities of the Wahabis under the leadership of Titu Mir, the authorities sought the immediate help from the then Governor-General Lord William Bentinck:

After what I have myself witnessed of the spirit, resolution and fanaticism of this most extraordinary body of men, whose numbers could not have been less than 1500, in league with all the surrounding villages, I have no hesitation making the most urgent representation to Government of the absolute necessity for prompt and efficient aid.²⁰

The Governor General responded almost immediately to the call for help and sent a full-fledged military force under the command of Major Scott, Lieutenant Shakespeare and Captain Sutherland containing a cavalry and artillery with three hundred armed personnel and two cannons.²¹ In the bitter battle that ensued between the colonial government and Titu Mir's peasant forces, the latter fought valiantly but eventually lost and died in the battlefield.²² About 800 rebels were apprehended and sent for trial at Alipur Court.²³

With the death of Titu Mir in the early 1830s, the movement lost its momentum in the region. Nevertheless the significance of the movement was far-reaching. It challenged the very framework of the colonial presence in the region,

¹⁹ Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*: p. 150.

²⁰ Judicial Proceedings (Criminal) Number 84, 22 November 1831, Government of Bengal, NAI.

²¹ Dasgupta, "Titu Meer's Rebellion: A Profile," p. 45.

²² Suprakash Roy, *Mukti Juddhe Bharatiya Krishak (Indian Peasants in the Freedom Struggle)*, Calcutta: 1980, p. 35.

²³ Michael Mann, *South Asia's Modern History: Thematic Perspective*, New York: Routledge, 2015, p. 150.

albeit in a limited way, which depended to a large extent on the land revenue exaction from the peasants. Even though there was a deliberate attempt on the part of the colonial government to categorise the movement in terms of 'religious fanaticism', there were others who were more skeptical. Even an otherwise conservative journal like 'John Bull' wrote in this context: 'It is doubtful how far fanaticism has to do with this disturbance. It rather seems to have arisen from absolute want and starvation.'²⁴ Titu Mir's movement turned out to be a direct manifestation of a determined class struggle of the poor peasants against colonial rule in Bengal.²⁵ The movement made use of religious ideology, as class struggles in the pre-industrialised society have often done. But though religious, it was not communalist.²⁶ The message of the movement were soon taken up and carried forward by the two disciples of Saiyed Ahmad – Unayat Ali and Inayat Ali – and slightly later by Keramut Ali. They were mainly active around the districts of Bengal and Bihar and spread the message far wide across the region.

When the rebellion broke out in 1857 in different parts of the Bengal Presidency, the authorities showed great concern with regards to the probable links between these sects and the mutinous sepoys. George N. Dodd, one of the earliest of the mutiny historians, remarked that 'a mischievous set of Mohammedans, under one Keramut Ali, were detected in the endeavour to sow the seeds of disaffection.'²⁷ Keramut Ali, a resident of Mullahata, Jaunpore, United Province, was one of the

²⁴ *John Bull*, reprinted in *Government Gazette*, 21 November 1831.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁶ Binay Ghosh, "Titu Meerer Dharma O Bidroha (the Religion and Rebellion of Titu Mir)," *Ekkhan*, 10, no. 6, 1973: p. 20.

²⁷ George Dodd, *The History of the Indian Revolt and of the Expeditions to Persia, China, and Japan, 1856-7-8*, London: W. and R. Chambers, 1859, p. 148.

more prominent leaders of the Wahabi movement during this time working chiefly in this part of the region. But as Jalal informs us, he had broken with the Tariqah-i-Muhammadi to form his own movement, called 'Taiyuni' (to identify) since he disagreed with the rejection of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence by Sayyid Ahmad's Wahabi followers.²⁸ Keramut Ali believed that the 'jihad' against the British was unjustified, and he concentrated on reforming Muslim society. Keramut Ali continued his preaching amongst the Muslims of Jessore, Khulna, Barisal, Pubna, Rajshahye, Dhaka and other nearby districts of the region during the period under review.²⁹ At around the same time, the Faraizis too, under the leadership of Dudu Miyan (1819-1862), were very active in different parts of the eastern Bengal. The Faraizi movement was founded in the year 1804 by Haji Shariatullah (1781-1840), a pious Muslim reformer from the Faridpur district of east Bengal.³⁰ The movement was initially started with a peaceful reformist agenda, trying to purify Islam that was said to have been impaired by growing superstitions and false beliefs amongst the Muslims of the region.³¹ According to Shariatullah's interpretation of Hanafi law, Friday congregational prayers were abolished designating India as a 'Dar-ul-Harb'.³² Similar to the Wahabi movement, the Faraizis too practiced a right adherence to the truth, abstinence from all ceremonies approaching worship of idols or men and a

²⁸ Jalal, *Partisans of Allah*: p. 135.

²⁹ Muin-uddin Ahmed Khan, "Sepoy Mutiny and the Muslim Society in Bengal," *Itihas Samiti Patrika (The Journal of Bangladesh Historical Association)*, 2, 1972: p. 150.

³⁰ Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, "The Ferazee and Wahabi Movements of Bengal," *Social Scientist*, 6, no. 2, 1977: 42-51, p. 42.

³¹ Murray T. Titus, *Islam in India and Pakistan*, Karachi: Royal Book Co., 1990, pp. 185-88.

³² Jalal, *Partisans of Allah*: p. 137.

strict conformity with the Quran. Based on the belief that the earth was a common property, the payment of land revenue was regarded as contrary to the divine law.³³

Many Hindus as well as British landlords of the area, along with the colonial administration in general, were concerned and alarmed by the development of the movement. Haji Shariatullah was soon exiled to Nawabganj, accused of being behind the protests and disturbances in East Bengal. Later he died in Dhaka district in 1840. But the movement was carried forward by his son, Dudu Miyan, under whom it tended to be more broad-based through an amalgam of political, economic and socio-religious programmes.³⁴ He organised resistance to Hindu landlords and money lenders, boycotting the payment of taxes and interest charges. He also formed an armed force of cudgel bearers to attack the zamindars and their followers and then went one stage further by attempting to form a parallel Muslim government within East Bengal. District Commissioners called Khalifas were appointed to each village, their role being to raise funds, carry out propaganda, and settle disputes between villagers who were expressly forbidden from taking their cases to the British courts without permission. The Colonial administration made persistent attempts to prosecute Dudu Miyan for crimes ranging from theft to murder. But all such allegations foundered from a lack of witnesses prepared to give evidence. Revolving around Dudu Miyan, the Faraizis built up a very well knit organization. The influence of the sect spread over several districts of eastern Bengal. In fact, the government reported that the number of Faraizis acknowledging Dudu Miyan as their

³³ Chattopadhyay, "The Ferazee and Wahabi Movements of Bengal," p. 44.

³⁴ Jalal, *Partisans of Allah*: p. 138.

leader was variously estimated from fifty to eighty thousand.³⁵ A very large proportion of the Muslim population of Faridpur, Bakhargunj and Jessore belonged to this sect.³⁶ However, it was Faridpur, the home district of Dudu Miyan, which became the center of the movement.

3.3 THE JESSORE CONSPIRACY CASE

The outbreak of the rebellion in 1857 furthered complicated the situation for the administration. The government was already concerned about the activities of the Wahabis and the Faraizis and apprehended probable links between the native sepoys and these sects because ‘only with Europeans here, there can be no danger, for they cannot fraternize with the Faraizis, but if the latter can give over native troops, all that has to be done is to murder a few European officers.’³⁷ Walter Scott Seton-Karr, who was appointed to officiate as Civil and Sessions Judge in the district of Jessore in the year 1857, wrote in this context:

The then head of the Faraizis was Dudhu Miyan, and he had been for sometime an object of suspicion to the Police authorities. The Faraizis held some very questionable and wild doctrines about the non-payment of rent to infidel zamindars. Some of them had been imprisoned for outrages on Hindu functionaries of a very violent character, and it was discovered some years afterwards, that this sect had correspondents amongst the Wahabis... in 1857 the Faraizis were

³⁵ Report from the Commissioner of Dacca to A.R. Young, Judicial Proceedings Numbers 98-100, 7 April 1847, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

³⁶ James Eardley Gastrell, *Geographical and Statistical Report of the Districts of Jessore, Fureedpore and Backergunge*: Calcutta, 1858, p. 36.

³⁷ *The Dacca News*, 19 June 1857.

mainly looked on as a fanatical sect, of new and violent political opinions.³⁸

During the early months of 1857 the Collector of Jessore sent a few leaflets of the sepoys to the Collector of Dhaka which contained 'seditious' and 'instigating' materials and enquired about similar such leaflets in Dhaka. Although the Collector of Dhaka could not trace any such leaflets in circulation, it however indicated the fact that secret activities of the sepoys had been going on for some time.³⁹ The reports submitted by the officials in Faridpur district however indicated the link established between the rebel sepoys and the Faraizis. The Joint Magistrate of Faridpur district in a report to the government stated that an anonymous petition had been presented stating that 'the Ferazees in a body were rising and had written to the sepoys for support'.⁴⁰ The local authorities in Dhaka received another petition from a person named Gyabullah in the month of August 1857. Gyabullah affirmed that he had knowledge of a secret meeting between two Hindustanis and some of the Faraizi Khalifas, and suggested that unless these Khalifas were detained, they might, in league with the sepoys, create a disturbance in the districts of Dhaka and Bakarganj.⁴¹ Under the present circumstances the government considered it

³⁸ Walter Scott Seton-Karr, *A Short Account of Events During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-8 in the Districts of Belgaum (in the Presidency of Bombay) and of Jessore (in the Presidency of Bengal)*, London: Spottiswoode, 1894, p. 19.

³⁹ Letter sent from the Collector of Jessore to the Magistrate of Dhaka dated 27 May 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 32, 5 June 1857, Government of Bengal, District Collectorate Records: Jessore, NAB.

⁴⁰ Letter sent from the Joint Magistrate of Faridpore to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Secret and Political Consultation Number 238 dated 26 July 1857, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

⁴¹ Judicial Proceeding Numbers 780-781, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

necessary to detain Dudu Miyan as a political prisoner. Accordingly, he was arrested and was kept under detention at the Alipur Jail in Calcutta till the rebellion came to an end.⁴² The authorities considered it prudent to keep him under arrest since ‘as long as Doodo Meah is kept from all communication with them there is little to fear from Ferazees.’⁴³ However the intention of the Faraizis to rise in support of mutineers was again confirmed in another anonymous petition addressed to the Governor General of India. The petitioners sent a list of names of Dudu Miyan’s followers, including that of his son-in-law, and warned the government that though Dudu Miyan was in jail his followers had become restive and might create troubles.⁴⁴ Considering the alarming situation, the colonial authorities decided to keep a close vigilance over these sects and orders were also issued to the Thana Darogahs ‘to keep a strict watch at all the *Ghats* on the Jamuna River and to apprehend every person who cannot give a satisfactory account of himself.’⁴⁵

However, in spite of the efforts on the part of the British government to stabilise the volatile situation, uneasiness continued to prevail in different parts of the province. In Jessore the sentiment of the people took different shape centering on the issue of conversion to Christianity.⁴⁶ One of the contemporary newspapers of the time, *The Dacca News*, wrote in this context: ‘Now and then we hear such expression as these amongst groups of labourers in the street: we will be cut to pieces sooner than give up our Deen and become Christians; the way of the Company is to take our

⁴² For further details, see Muin-ud-din Ahmad Khan, *History of the Fara’idi Movement in Bengal, 1818-1906*, Pakistan Historical Society Publication, Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1965.

⁴³ Judicial Proceedings Number 782, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁴⁴ Judicial Proceedings Number 532, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁴⁵ Letter from the Magistrate of Pubna to the Government of Bengal, 27 November 1857, Pubna District Records, Volume 233, pp: 8-9, NAB.

⁴⁶ “The Defence of Dacca”, *The Dacca News*, 22 August 1857, p. 335.

religion bit by bit, Sati, Widow Marriage and so forth.⁴⁷ Rumour had spread out taking multiplying form in Jessore and the adjoining regions and an obvious reaction to this rumour in public mind was manifested in mortification and ultimate displeasure towards the Company's rule. Curiously though, there were neither any regular in-service native sepoys stationed nor the movement of any disbanded sepoys at Jessore. But what had given rise to suspicion and agony amongst the colonial officials was the presence of thirty Najibs. The term 'Najib' was applied to a body of irregular infantry under the native government.⁴⁸ Under the British government the Najibs were retained chiefly as a kind of militia and most of them were hailed from the North-west Provinces. Most of these Najibs were either retired or disbanded 'sepoys' who had previously served in the Company in several wars, like against the Afghans and the Sikhs. For instance, Jamadar Ram Singh was employed after the 2nd Sikh War, in the jail at Amballa and then was made a Najib, and then promoted to be a Jamadar by Mr. Ward.⁴⁹ All these Najibs were recruited for the establishment of the Commission for the Suppression of Dacoity and were placed under a Jamadar and they were all accommodated in a large compound opposite to what was then known as the Planter's Club.

The Office of the Commissioner was established in Bengal in 1852 in order to check the increasing number of Dacoities that the administration could not handle

⁴⁷ "The Defence of Dacca", *The Dacca News*, 22 August 1857, p. 336.

⁴⁸ 'Najibs', or 'Nujeebs', refers to a kind half disciplined infantry soldiers under some of the native governments. Also used for a kind of militia under the British. Source: Sir Henry Yule, A. C. Burnell, and William Crooke, *Hobson-Jobson: Being a Glossary of Anglo-Indian Colloquial Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms; Etymological, Historical, Geographical, and Discursive*, London: John Murray, 1886, p. 483.

⁴⁹ Judicial Proceedings Number 650, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

with the existing police system.⁵⁰ The Court of Directors in its letter to the Governor General in Council dated 24 September 1856 clearly stated that the spectre of the poor performance of the Police in different parts of Bengal, combined with the many incidental notices of failure or abuse, deepened its conviction ‘that an immediate and thorough reform of the police in all the old Provinces of British India is loudly called for.’⁵¹ Already, as Basudeb Chattopadhyay had mentioned, the success of the ‘Thagi’ programme, launched by W.H. Sleeman caught the imagination of the administrators.⁵² Sleeman was appointed as the superintendent of a police

⁵⁰ For more details, see “Towards Reform: When Riot became Rebellion” in Basudeb Chattopadhyay, *Crime and Control in Early Colonial Bengal, 1770-1860*, Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co, 2000, pp. 150-61.

⁵¹ F.J. Halliday, *Minute of the Honourable F.J. Halliday, Lieut.-Governor of Bengal, on the State of the Police, and of Criminal Justice in the Lower Provinces of Bengal*, London: Fetter and Galpin, 1856.

⁵² ‘Thagis’, variously spelled as ‘Thugs’ or ‘Thuggees’. In the colonial period the term applied to a robber or assassin of a peculiar class, who sallying forth in gang and in the character of wayfarers, either on business or pilgrimage, fall in with other travellers on road, and having gained their confidence, take a favourable opportunity of strangling them by throwing their turbans or handkerchiefs round their necks and then plundering them and burying their bodies. Source: Hobson Jobson, op. cit., pp.: 696-698; For a more nuanced interpretation on the *Thagis* and their relation with the society and the colonial government, see Kim A. Wagner, *Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; Mike Dash, *Thug: The True Story of India's Murderous Religion*, London: Granta Books, 2005; Tom Lloyd, “Acting in the Theatre of Anarchy: The Anti-Thug Campaign and Elaborations of Colonial Rule in Early Nineteenth-Century India”, *Edinburgh Papers in South Asian Studies*, Number 19, 2006; Radhika Singha, “Providential circumstances: The thuggee campaign of the 1830s and legal innovation”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, no. 1, 1993, pp. 83-146. While scholars like Amal Chatterjee denied the existence of ‘thuggee’ by arguing that ‘Thuggee’ was a conspiracy perpetrated not by rapacious indigenes but by rapacious colonisers, Kim Wagner and Mike Dash have questioned such denial, as made by Chatterjee. As Wagner observed, it is not possible to disprove the colonial understanding of ‘Thuggee’ and so denying their existence without providing an alternative would be a mis-representation of facts and history. See: Amal Chatterjee, *Representations of India, 1740-1840*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998, pp. 125-38; Kim Wagner,

organisation known as the ‘Thuggee and the Dacoity Department’ established in the year 1838.⁵³ The basic strategy of Sleeman’s outfit was the ‘approver system’ whereby the convicted Thagis were offered suspension of sentences on condition that they disclosed the identities and the crimes committed by the gang. Sleeman claimed that the wider population were either too terrified to testify against the Thagis, or too ignorant of the menace that lurked in the margins of their societies. Proof of ‘Thuggee’, as Tom Lloyd noted, could only have come from the Thagis themselves.⁵⁴ The category of ‘approver’, according to Kim Wagner, was derived from the old English law, and is defined as a criminal who, in return for his own pardon, testifies to the complicity of his accomplices in the crime in question. The role of the approver was thus to *approve* the identity and involvement of his fellow accomplices.⁵⁵ An elaborate network of informers spread over an extensive catchment area enabled Sleeman to eventually eradicate much of the alleged menace. It is also interesting to note, as Wagner pointed out, that part of Sleeman’s success in getting the approvers to denounce their former comrades derived from his strategy of playing different approver factions out against each other. The factions were constituted primarily of family and caste members and thus Muslim approvers would gladly denounce Hindu suspects and *vice versa*.⁵⁶ There were of course, occasional sceptics who argued that

“The Deconstructed Strangers: A Reassessment of Thuggee”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 38, no. 4: 2004, p. 937.

⁵³ Wagner, *Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India*: p. 215.

⁵⁴ Lloyd, “Acting in the Theatre of Anarchy”, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Wagner, *Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India*: p. 235.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 211. Wagner however reminds us that although the contribution of Sleeman cannot be denied in shaping the Thuggee campaign, the use of approvers and rewards as a system to apprehend the criminals existed before 1809, and was not Sleeman’s brain-child. For further details see: Wagner, *Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India*., p. 217.

the repressive measures adopted by Sleeman curtailed the already limited legal protection for the accused thereby making a mockery of the Rule of Law. However, to these critics, Sleeman turned a Machiavellian face arguing that in a country like India it was pointless to quibble over the means. To him, in order to combat greater evils, radically unorthodox measures were necessary. Thus, in view of the efficacy of this method, the Dacoity Commission was now extended to other areas in the lower Province in Bengal and the Commissioner was empowered to summon all the necessary information from the concerned Magistrates. In the period under review, at the head of the Dacoity establishment was an experienced Bengali officer called Baboo Guru Charan Dass who, according to Seton-Karr, was 'an official of some experience and decided sharpness.'⁵⁷

In the second half of July 1857, according to the information supplied by Baboo Guru Charan Dass, it was alleged that the Jamadar, the head of the Najib guards, and his subordinates were found to be involved in highly treasonable conversations, regarding the activities of mutineers in different parts of India. They were alleged to be predicting the imminent downfall of the Company's rule, and also conspiring with some other Bengalis of the area about the great political change that was about to come in India.⁵⁸ As noted in the previous chapter in detail, rumours of these kinds, which are not based on evidence, were common all through the nineteenth century. However what made these rumours a cause of anxiety and deep concern for the administration was the cumulative effect of the rumours that was being followed by

⁵⁷ Seton-Karr, *A Short Account of Events During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857*: p. 20.

⁵⁸ Letter sent from the Magistrate of Jessore to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 23 July 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 658, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, Jessore Collectorate Records, NAB.

actual incidents taking place around the country at this point of time. Therefore, under the present circumstances, the authorities in Jessore expressed deep concern and as a panic measure, the Magistrate of Jessore, Edmund Weldon Melony, sent private messages to F.C. Fowle, J.P. Grant, J. Elliott and C.B. Skinner, asking them to assemble in a definite place immediately.⁵⁹ It was considered wise to disarm and arrest the Najibs in the first instance. Soon the European civilians posted for the administration in the district, were transformed into ‘civilian soldiers, and being armed with pistols proceeded straightway to arrest the rebellious Jamadars and Najibs’.⁶⁰ The sentry on guard of the Jamadar resisted and came forward with his sword but was immediately disarmed.

The administration succeeded in arresting five principal Najibs without much difficulty. The entire operation was accomplished with extreme quickness and with utmost secrecy. The next morning, when E.W. Molony intimated details of the whole incident to Seton-Karr, the then Civil and Sessions Judge of Jessore, he immediately wrote an official and demi-official letter to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, F.J. Halliday, asking him to confer Seton-Karr with the power to conduct a summary trial under the special Act. As stated in the earlier chapter, Regulation V of 1857 and Section One of Act XVII of 1857 introduced by Lord Canning, the Governor General of India had bestowed the European citizens with the power to try the suspects and the rebels in Court martial, although a formal permission from the Supreme Authority

⁵⁹ Letter sent from the Magistrate of Jessore to the Collector of Jessore dated 28 July 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 712-14, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, Jessore Collectorate Records, NAB. F.C. Fowle was the Collector of the district, J. Elliott was the Doctor and J.P. Grant was the Assistant.

⁶⁰ Seton-Karr, *A Short Account of Events During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857*: p. 21.

was required before exercising the power.⁶¹ Under the present circumstances it was therefore not surprising that Seton-Karr was immediately empowered with this special power by the Governor General Canning.⁶² Seton-Karr however decided to keep this as a secret so that no one else could have any idea of his extended powers till the Sessions trial was concluded.

Following the usual practice, E.W. Moley first committed two Najibs, who were initially suspected to be the ring-leaders behind the entire 'seditious' plot, and the Civil and Sessions Judge having found enough evidence against them sentenced them to transportation for life. However the authorities soon realised that the actual ringleaders were not apprehended and thus the real truth still remained unclear. He therefore had to resort to Sleeman's approval system. Accordingly, E.W. Molony apprehended nearly all the remaining Najibs and remanded them with the hope that such drastic action could pressurise them to come up with the actual truth.⁶³ Ultimately, this brought the desired result and one of the convicted Najib came forward to give evidence and following this lead, a few others too volunteered to provide the information regarding the 'seditious' plans of the Jamadar and the Najibs.⁶⁴ Later in the year, Bechu Singh, the Najib who provided the valuable information to the government, was handsomely rewarded and was promoted to the

⁶¹ Proceedings of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of India Military Department, Judicial Proceedings Number 662, Letter Number 90/8(a), 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁶² Letter sent from the Secretary to the Government of Bengal to Civil and Sessions Judge of Jessore dated 28 July 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 324, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁶³ Letter sent from the Magistrate of Jessore to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 5 August 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 437, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁶⁴ Judicial Proceedings Number 479, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

position of Jamadarship, while Govind Singh, another of the Najib, was promoted to the Duffadarship.⁶⁵ According to the information provided by these Najibs and other witnesses, the Jamadar Ram Singh, in action with the Najibs, had chalked out a clear plan to attack the treasury of the Collectorate who was known to have with him no less than ten thousand gold Mohurs.⁶⁶ With the seized money they were then planning to set the bazar on fire, liberate the prisoners from the jail and then head off to Murshidabad and join the rebels or mutineers over there at the first convenient opportunity.⁶⁷ It was discovered that the Jamadar Ram Singh, who was a native of Murshidabad and was a sowar in Ranjit Singh's bodyguard, was the prime mover in the whole affair. He had been in private correspondence with the mutinous sepoy both at Murshidabad and at Allahabad. Apparently, Ram Singh the Jamadar had received a letter from a sepoy of the 63rd Native Infantry at Barrackpore informing him that they had sided against the government and invited him 'to join them with as many followers as he could collect.'⁶⁸ The Jamadar also found 12 or 13 of his men willing to join him. He was also found speaking openly against the Company's rule in the manner that the native raj would soon be reinstated and as a consequence all the English speaking persons would be thrown out and the court language would only be

⁶⁵ Deposition of Bechu Singh, forwarded letter from the Magistrate of Jessore to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 12 August 1857, Secret and Political Consultations Number 137, 20 August 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

⁶⁶ Deposition of Bechu Singh, forwarded letter from the Magistrate of Jessore to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 12 August 1857, Secret and Political Consultations Number 137, 20 August 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI. *Mohurs*: coins made up of valuable metals, mainly gold.

⁶⁷ Judicial Proceedings Number 653, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁶⁸ Judicial Proceedings Number 667, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA; Deposition of Bechu Singh, forwarded letter from the Magistrate of Jessore to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 12 August 1857, Secret and Political Consultations Number 137, 20 August 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

Persian thenceforth.⁶⁹ The extent to which colonial officials were terrified by this whole issue and considered the whole incident to be of utmost significance is evident from the statement of the Civil and Sessions Judge himself. He wrote:

Sitting as judge of life and death, without any appeal from my decision, I considered that words and intentions derived their significance from surrounding circumstances; and that what might be loose and idle talk, or evidence of the speaker's insanity, at a time of profound peace and security, assumed a very different aspect if spoken when rebellion and mutiny had occurred over a large part of the Empire.⁷⁰

Considering the exigency of the situation Seton-karr decided that an exemplary and harsh punishment, in tune with the example set by Sir Christopher Rawlinson – the Chief Justice of the Madras Supreme Court – regarding a similar incident, was the order of the day in order to give confidence to the loyal part of of the population, both and European and the natives.⁷¹ It is important to point out in this context that the convicted were tried in the court without any jury, but with two loaded pistols by the Judge's side as a precautionary measure. It was one of the many instances of the kangaroo trials that were now made possible by Lord Canning under the Special act of 1857.

In the trial it was decided that the convicted would be sentenced to death. While passing on his judgment against the Jamadar Ram Singh, the Civil and Sessions

⁶⁹ Judicial Proceedings Number 650, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁷⁰ Seton-Karr, *A Short Account of Events During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857*: p. 22.

⁷¹ Seton-Karr, *A Short Account of Events During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857*: p. 22.

Judge commented that 'he [the Jamadar] is evidently a man of influence and determination. Provided the unprotected state of the district... I am bound for the sake of future security to the mass of the people, to make a striking example of this man.'⁷² Thus, the decision to award the death sentence was also meant for giving a salutary warning to all the other natives of the region so that they did not dare even to think of conspiring against the government. Therefore the manner of the execution of the death sentence was intended to make a more effective and lasting impact among the local populace. The trial was conducted at around 4 P.M. on Saturday. However the colonial government considered that a quick execution of the death sentence would not be able to bring the desired effect. Since the next day was Sunday, an official holiday, and less people around, the day and time of the execution chosen was on Monday, when the area would be crowded with people going to the market. Accordingly Seton-Karr decided that the Jamadar would be hung on the Monday morning at a public place known as 'Tin Mohini' (The three cross-roads), located in front of the police station near the market, from where a vast number of native populace would be able to observe the execution directly.⁷³ As was the case with the Berhampore mutineers, it was also a punishment as a spectacle. The method of execution was in contravention to the normal practice. All the Englishmen residing in the area of Jessore were well-armed and attended the execution on horse-back like a royal celebration. Furthermore, as if the public execution was not enough to satisfy

⁷² Judicial Proceedings Number 650, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁷³ Seton-Karr, *A Short Account of Events During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857*: p. 22.

the purpose of the colonial government, the corpse of the Jamadar was allowed to remain suspended the whole day, with the handkerchief tied over the face.⁷⁴

The government as well as the European population of the city in and around Jessore were deeply concerned and in a state of panic following the incident. The alarm was also expressed by the Magistrate of Jessore who proposed that as a precautionary measure a force of 20 or 30 men to be sent up for general purposes such as guarding the jail and the treasury on an emergency or 'putting down any uprising in any part of the district before it gained head. The men should be sent up armed... their presence would also have a very good moral effect and by a show of preparation would inspire confidence in the well-effected and terror in the ill-effected part of the population.'⁷⁵ The extent to which the event in Jessore stirred the colonial authorities in general is also reflective from the private letter written by Lord Dalhousie, then residing in England, and also from Lady Canning, both of whom entirely approved of the means by which the authorities dealt with the 'culprits' and expressed their satisfaction with the hope that such a successful 'salutary warning' should stop further plots of similar kind.⁷⁶ A few observations can be made in this context. Firstly, this particular event made the authorities apprehensive regarding the employment of the native ex-army men and the disbanded sepoy in matters of civil administration. Although the authorities did manage to avert the 'open acts of rebellion' in Jessore by their timely intervention, the event is significant in the

⁷⁴ Letter sent from the Magistrate of Jessore to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 24 August 1857, Secret and Political Consultations Number 348, 1 September 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

⁷⁵ Letter sent from the Magistrate of Jessore to the Civils and Sessions Judge dated 8 September 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 650, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁷⁶ Seton-Karr, *A Short Account of Events During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857*: p. 24.

context of understanding the broader participation of the native populace in rebellion of 1857. In the event discussed above, the presence of in-service native sepoy in Jessore and its vicinity was hardly noticeable. In fact, there were no sepoy barracks in Jessore and its vicinity at the time; the nearest ones being situated about hundred miles to the east in Dhaka, and about the same distance in west at Murshidabad.⁷⁷ Almost all the actors involved in the ‘mutinous conspiracy’ were native sepoy but who had earlier retired from their services and were now a part of the civil administration. According to the information provided by Mr. J.R. Ward, the Magistrate of the Dacoity Commission in Jessore, the Jamadar Ram Singh, the prime mover of the whole affair, was in the 31st Bengal Native Infantry who retired in 1846, while one of the Duffadars got his discharge from the 40th Native Infantry about the same time, and one of the Najibs left the 42nd Native Infantry after the Punjab campaign.⁷⁸ This assertion on the part of the Magistrate in a way shows that even he found it hard to believe that it was the sepoy who had hatched the ‘conspiracy’. On the contrary this involved a set of people who had left the army quite a few years back and as the administration felt, was driven by an anti-British feeling that did not originate from the cantonments. At the same time, this particular event also shows the network of communication that the rebels were able to establish to an extent with the civil population in the region. As Seton-Karr had pointed out while passing sentence against the conspirators that the witness was ‘invited to join the prisoner in a conspiracy to rebel and murder... what to him was the representative of the British power, i.e., the Civil Magistrate.’⁷⁹ Also, the way the conspiracy of the intended

⁷⁷ Judicial Proceedings Number 854, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁷⁸ Judicial Proceedings Number 872, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁷⁹ Judicial Proceedings Number 909, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

rebellion was hatched suggests the stark similarity in terms of the mode of actions – plundering the treasury and the Collector’s office, burning down the government houses and setting free the prisoners from the jail – on the part of ‘conspirators’ in Jessore and the mutineers in different parts of the country. As Rudrangshu Mukherjee has argued in the context of the rebel actions in Awadh, this was not just a symptom of mindless pathological disorder on the part of the mutineers.⁸⁰ ‘The destruction of property – or direct action – is a common phenomenon in “popular movements” involving crowds or “mobs”.’⁸¹ Properties owned, used or lived in by the English or the Europeans were the objects of the wrath of the mutinous sepoys. They saw in the Raj an entity and structure that was intervening in their rights, customs and practices. As a result they intended to frontally assault and destroy the proximate symbols of that structure.⁸² As a further proof to the fact that these rebel ‘conspiracies’ were not unfounded or the figment of imagination of the colonial officials, borne out of fear and panic, will be corroborated by the following events that unfolded in the nearby region of Chittagong, as we move on to the next section.

3.4 CHITTAGONG UPRISING

In the remaining months of the year, two major incidents related to the uprising deserve our attention. The most important of these occurred at Chittagong in November. Chittagong was an important port in eastern India, which had a long

⁸⁰ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 71.

⁸¹ For further details see "The Motives of Revolutionary Crowds" in George Rude, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.

⁸² Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 71.

history of trade across the Middle-East, China, Turkey and Europe.⁸³ This port handled a large amount of shipping for the East India Company's trade across the South-East Asian countries. Naturally, the Company was particularly concerned to ensure its protection. The situation in Chittagong was generally peaceful in the first half of 1857. As noted in the previous chapter, seven companies of the 34th Native Infantry stationed at Barrackpore had already been disarmed following Mangal Pandey's mutiny. The remaining three companies of the 34th, i.e., the 2nd, 3rd and the 4th, were garrisoned at Chittagong. Following the 'disgraceful conduct' and the subsequent disbandment of the companies 34th Regiment in Barrackpore, the companies stationed at Chittagong expressed their loyalty through an application where they mentioned that,

By a careful performance of our duties we have gained a reputation for fidelity to the Government; these men [the disbanded companies of the 34th Regiment in Barrackpore] have deprived us of it... we all know that the Government will consider us as faithful as ever, and we pray that this petition may be sent to the Governor General in order that his Lordship may know the state of our feelings.⁸⁴

⁸³ Biplab Dasgupta, *European Trade and Colonial Conquest*, Vol: 1, Anthem South Asian Studies, London: Anthem Press, 2005, p. 177-78.

⁸⁴ Translation of the petition of the officers and sepoy of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Companies, 34th Regiment Native Infantry, dated Chittagong, 22 April 1857, Chittagong District Collectorate Records, Chittagong, NAB. Also see: Translation of the petition of commissioned and non-commissioned officers and sepoy of 2nd, 3rd and 4th companies, 34th regiment, Native Infantry, dated 22 April 1857, in Forrest, *Selections from the Letters*, Vol. 1: p. 175.

They also urged the government to send them to Delhi and other places in order to fight against the rebel sepoys.⁸⁵ But, in spite of the repeated assurance of fidelity on the part of the sepoys stationed in Chittagong, there were periodic reports of panic all through these months. The Commanding officer of the 34th Native Infantry had already warned the Commissioner of Chittagong regarding some of the drafts drawn up by some sepoys of the Detachment in favour of their relations with the sepoys in the North Western Provinces.⁸⁶ The authorities continued to be apprehensive and extremely alarmed because of the prevailing rumour that the city of Chittagong would soon be ransacked by the disgruntled sepoys and every European resident of the city would be dead.⁸⁷ In Chittagong many of the European residents resorted to their private boats and continued there to remain out of harm's way.⁸⁸ The government tried its best to maintain peace and order in the district but with no success. However the situation, according the official reports, was still under control. But by November things had changed beyond recognition.

On the night of 18 November 1857 the three detachments of the 34th Native Infantry stationed at Chittagong had mutinied. They plundered the treasury, released the prisoners from the jail, killed one of the jail barkandazes, burnt down their own lines, fired the magazines and then left the station, carrying off with them three government elephants and the whole of the treasure they found in the office of the

⁸⁵ Letters from the Magistrate of Chittagong to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 27 June 1857, Chittagong District Collectorate Records, Chittagong, NAB.

⁸⁶ Commissioner of Chittagong to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated 3 October 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 139, 5 November 1857, WBSA.

⁸⁷ Judicial Proceedings Number 436, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁸⁸ Judicial Proceedings Number 384, 17 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

Collectorate.⁸⁹ Although the name of one Havildar Rajab Ali Khan has been mentioned in some of the native literatures, as the principal actor behind the whole plan, no conclusive evidence has ever been cited in support of this.⁹⁰ However, we do come across the name of one Takur Bax, a pensioned Jamadar of Chittagong, who was allegedly found to be associated with the sepoys of the 34th Regiment Native Infantry during the time of the rebellion.⁹¹

It is interesting to mention in this context that during the rebellion of 1857, the rebels always targeted the jails. As Clare Anderson pointed out, this was not just for practical purposes such as the acquisition of labour and supplies, but also because they saw them as one of the principle instruments of colonial rule and the multiple cultural and religious transgressions that implied.⁹² In other words, prisons were considered as an imposing representation and embodiment of culturally intrusive forms of colonial governance.⁹³ The other important aspect of this act of breaking the jails and releasing the prisoners was that escaped prisoners were important sources of information about the progress of the rebellion, and their arrival in the districts even heralded its spread.⁹⁴ Indeed, they were involved in the transmission of the rumours that assumed such a central place in the revolt. The conduit of information was all the more pronounced because long-term prisoners were often imprisoned in jails

⁸⁹ Further Papers (Number 9 in continuation of Number 7), Insurrection in the East Indies, Presented to both the Houses of Parliament, Enclosure in Number 5. BLOC; Special Narrative of Events Dated 5 December 1857, p. 326-27, WBSA.

⁹⁰ Special Narrative of Events Dated 5 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA

⁹¹ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, "The Revolt of 1857: Role of Various Social Groups of East Bengal," *Jahangiranagar Review*, 4, 1980: p. 4.

⁹² Anderson, *Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion*: p. 2.

⁹³ Anderson, *Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion*: p. 58.

⁹⁴ Mark Thornhill, *The Personal Adventures and Experiences of a Magistrate During the Rise, Progress, and Suppression of the Indian Mutiny, Etc*, London: John Murray, 1884, p. 146.

some distance from their districts, and after their release they made for home. In addition, Anderson further explained that the mutineers-rebels opened prisons, often by the sepoys, looking to release locally influential prisoners in order to intensify unrest.⁹⁵ This was also corroborated from the writing of A. R. Young, the secretary to the government of Bengal. He wrote: 'The first object of all rebels and mutineers appears to be to inflict the greatest possible amount of mischief to society generally, and to associate with themselves in their work of massacre and destruction the ready instruments that exist in all jails.'⁹⁶ But quite clearly, there were more to jail-breaking than the above mentioned comment indicated.

In regard to the conduct of Takur Bax, the Collector of Chittagong later reported that he was on terms of intimacy with the men of the detachment before the outbreak.⁹⁷ The general impression entertained by the European population in Chittagong was that 'Takur Bax (was) in some way connected with the mutiny, but no reliable evidence was forthcoming whereby he can completely be said to be satisfactorily proved nor with one exception any presumptive evidence which may not fairly be refuted.'⁹⁸ The Thannah Barkandaz who was on guard duty at the Magistrate's Cutcherry on the night of the mutiny later reported that he saw Takur Bax leading the mutinous sepoys, instructing them to plunder the treasury and to release the prisoners from the jail.⁹⁹ Some of the prisoners who were later captured

⁹⁵ Anderson, *Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion*: p. 57.

⁹⁶ Quoted from Anderson, *Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion*: pp. 57-58.

⁹⁷ Collector of Chittagong to Pay Master Native Pension Department, 14 June 1858, Bangladesh Secretariat Records, Chittagong District, Volume 350, Letter Number 107, pp. 96-107, NAB.

⁹⁸ Collector of Chittagong to Pay Master Native Pension Department, 14 June 1858, Bangladesh Secretariat Records, Chittagong District, Volume 350, Letter Number 108-9, pp. 110-112, NAB.

⁹⁹ Letter sent from the Commissioner of Chittagong to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Secret and Political Consultation Number 358, 26 November 1857, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

also reported that it was on the advice of Takur Bax that the lines were burnt and the magazines blown up, the same course which had been followed in almost every instances of the mutiny.¹⁰⁰ But in spite of their suspicion of the Jamadar's involvement in the whole affair, the authorities could not be certain of the charges brought against him as there was no reliable evidence to prove him guilty of treachery or open acts of rebellion. Perhaps the main reason for which the authorities were reluctant to convict Takur Bax was the fact that all these reports became available to the government only when the rebellion was coming to a close. As the Collector of Chittagong noted later,

...that no steps were taken to verify the truth of the account of his proceedings immediately after the mutiny is such to be regretted as no doubt a few minutes attentive then would have satisfactorily cleared up the mystery which it does not seem possible to determine now, but much allowance must be made for the feeling of insecurity which for long pervaded the mind of all and for some days suspended all the actions.¹⁰¹

In his defence, Takur Bax repeatedly denied any kind of involvement with the mutinous sepoys of the 34th Regiment. But he admitted the fact that during the outbreak, 'the sepoys had plundered his house and belongings and 'had beaten him with the butt ends of their muskets for not consenting to be the Rajah of the

¹⁰⁰ Letter sent from the Commissioner of Chittagong to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Secret and Political Consultation Number 358, 26 November 1857, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

¹⁰¹ Collector of Chittagong to Pay Master Native Pension Department, 14 June 1858, Bangladesh Secretariat Records, Chittagong District, Volume 350, Letter Number 108-9, pp. 110-112, NAB.

district.’¹⁰² This statement of Takur Bax does indicate that the object of overthrowing the British Raj was conveyed to the rebellious sepoy of the 34th Native Infantry in Chittagong. It is also interesting to note that the night before the outbreak on 18 November 1857, arrangements were made for a large feast of some sort by the sepoy, whereby the mutineers had chalked out the details of the plan of attack for the next day.¹⁰³ All these indicate a pattern that the mutineers were following in accordance with the rebel sepoy of northern India. The mutiny was not accompanied by physical violence against the Europeans. None of the European residents were injured.

Nevertheless, this was indeed a major development. The already beleaguered Company was particularly concerned about its fallout especially in the neighbouring districts. The district officers were instructed to watch the movement of the mutineers. On the basis of their reports the precise trajectory of their movements can be reconstructed. From Chittagong the mutineers headed towards the princely state of Tripura. The Raja of Tripura was accordingly instructed to prevent the onward movement of the mutineers and to apprehend them if possible. All the boats in the ferry had also been seized to prevent them from crossing over to Tripura.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the Chittagong mutineers did manage to cross over and entered the independent territory of the Rajah of Tripura on 22 November 1857. Having spent a few days in the hills and jungles of Tripura they tried to enter into Cachar and

¹⁰² Collector of Chittagong to Pay Master Native Pension Department, 14 June 1858, Bangladesh Secretariat Records, Chittagong District, Volume 230, Letter Number 107, p. 98, NAB.

¹⁰³ Letter sent from the Commissioner of Chittagong to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Secret and Political Consultation Number 358, 26 November 1857, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

¹⁰⁴ Special Narrative Number 35 of 1857, Judicial Department 5 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

thereafter to Manipur.¹⁰⁵ It seems reasonable to infer that the rebels of Chittagong received some support from the local population, especially hill tribes of the region. Some apprehensions were also entertained that they should be joined by the subjects of the Rajah of Tripura.¹⁰⁶ The Commissioner of Chittagong Division grudgingly admitted that 'so many as 1200 people were said to have engaged themselves in opening roads, cutting jungles and procuring provisions for them.'¹⁰⁷

To make the matter worse, it was further reported that the princes of Manipur joined the Chittagong mutineers. After being defeated at a place called Latu in Sylhet the mutineers entered the Manipur territory and were joined by the Manipuri princes with his followers. An official report also runs to the effect that the Manipuri princes were in operation on the bank of the river Barak. Probably as a sequel to this several princes of the Manipur royal family were kept under detention in the Cachar jail. Narendrajit Singh, the chief of the Manipur rebel princes broke his arrest and fled to Manipur.¹⁰⁸ The Chittagong mutineers, aided by Narendrjit Singh and six other princes of Manipur along with their followers, confronted Lieutenant Ross and Lieutenant Birst, who were stationed at a place called Birmacondy.¹⁰⁹ At the time of

¹⁰⁵ Further Papers (Number 9 in continuation of Number 7), Insurrection in the East Indies, Presented to both the Houses of Parliament, p. 327, BLOC.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Enclosure 1 in Number 6, Special Narrative of Events, Judicial Department Proceedings dated 12 December 1857, p. 333, WBSA.

¹⁰⁷ Enclosure 3 in Number 6, Special Narrative of Events, Judicial Department proceedings dated 12 December 1857, WBSA.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from the Political Agent at Manipur to the Officiating Secretary of the Government of India in Bengal, Home Public Proceeding Number: 112, dated 17 April 1858, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁰⁹ Letter sent from Lieutenant R. Stewart Officiating Superintendent, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 13 January 1858, Home Public Proceedings Number 55, 26 January 1858, Government of Bengal, NAI.

attack, the colonial officials had about 250 men with them. After a heavy exchange of fire, which lasted for about three hours, the mutineers were defeated following which they dispersed into the forest. The officials did apprehend a few of the mutineers and were subsequently tried, sentenced and executed, but the rebel princes managed to escape with the help of their supporters around the region.¹¹⁰ The evidence of the prince having joined the mutineers of the 34th Native Infantry was said to be complete.¹¹¹ Rana Singh, the Diwan of the state, was also an accomplice in the 'seditious' activities. The administration was also anxious about the fact that the mutineers were being aided by the local Kookie people by supplying foods, carrying their baggage and also cutting paths for them through the jungles.¹¹² It is to be noted that the Kookies were local tribes who lived in the hills of Tripura and in Manipur and Lushai hills on the south.¹¹³ The correspondence from H.S.Metcalf, the Judge of Tripura, expressed the similar apprehension on the part of the government: 'I have no idea that the Maharaja who is as timid as a girl will communicate with the mutineers, but I think his Kookie subjects may give us trouble.'¹¹⁴ The interesting point to explore in this regard is the statement of the Judge of Tripura. In a letter dated 23 November 1857, he stated in a convincing manner that these Kookies, who

¹¹⁰ Letter sent from Lieutenant R. Stewart Officiating Superintendent, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 13 January 1858, Home Public Proceedings Number 56, 26 January 1858, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹¹¹ House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Further Papers Presented to both the Houses of Parliament Volume 9, pp. 379, 385, 414, BLOC.

¹¹² Letters from the Official Magistrate of Tipperah to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated 29 November 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 211, 17 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹¹³ S.B. Chaudhuri, *Civil Disturbances during the British Rule in India (1765-1857)*, Calcutta: The World Press, 1955, p. 108.

¹¹⁴ Judicial Proceedings Number 206, 17 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

were being used as coolies and guides through the jungles, were arranged prior to the rebellion by the rebels.¹¹⁵ This statement of the Judge of Tripura further corroborate to the fact that the rebels of Chittagong had charted out a plan and course of action to be followed prior to the uprising. Although there is little doubt about the active participation of the Kookies with the Chittagong mutineers, the statement of the Judge of Tripura regarding their alliance prior to the outbreak of the rebellion in Chittagong however seems to be a bit too farfetched as it was not supported by factual evidences of any kind.

The network of connection that the rebels were able to develop with the hill tribes such as Kookies, and with Manipuri princes or Chera chiefs is an interesting story that would repay careful investigation. Unfortunately the paucity of documents did not allow us to make further exploration on this. The Commissioner of the Chittagong division, however, attributed this nexus to liberal distribution of the money the rebels had plundered, which enabled them to make hill men their friends. Needless to say, the explanation sounds too simplistic and is in tune with the conspiracy theories forwarded by colonial officials. The Chittagong mutineers were either killed or apprehended towards the close of 1857 and the early months of 1858. Those who were apprehended were tried under Act XVII of 1857 by the Sessions Judge of Dhaka. Ten of them were sentenced to death and the rest to transportation for life.¹¹⁶ It was later reported that rest of the Chittagong mutineers were on their way to Dhaka to join the sepoys of the 73rd Native Infantry, but later changed their

¹¹⁵ Letter from Metcalfe reporting proceedings of the Chittagong mutineers and the measures adopted by him regarding the station at Cummillah, dated 23 November 1857, Home Public Proceeding Number: 56, 14 December 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹¹⁶ Letter sent from A.R. Young to the Secretary to the Government of India dated 5 December 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 209, 17 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

course and crossed the Tripura hills to join the men stationed at Sylhet.¹¹⁷ A few of them were captured but the bulk managed to escape. The Magistrate of Chittagong later in his report pointed out the complete lack of civilian sympathy towards the Company during the uprising.¹¹⁸ However the Chittagong mutiny had a somewhat unanticipated impact on Dhaka.

3.5 THE UPRISING OF THE 73rd REGIMENT NATIVE INFANTRY IN DHAKA

Dhaka had already been closely monitored by the colonial officials because of the on-going activities of the Faraizis, in addition to its large population of Muslims.¹¹⁹ At the end of May or beginning of June 1857, two of the companies of the 73rd regiment arrived from their headquarter in Jalpaiguri as a relief for those that had been in Dhaka for some time. In Dhaka, there were stationed two companies of the 73rd infantry numbering in all about 180 men, along with about 30 artilleries, two six-pounder field guns, and the magazines.¹²⁰ It is important to note here that the regiment of 73rd Native Infantry were mostly reecruited from the Arrah and Shahabad area of Kunwar Singh, the zamindar of Jagdishpur in Bihar, and from the regions

¹¹⁷ "The Mutinies", *The Dacca News*, Vol.: 2, Number: 87, 19 December 1857, p. 542.

¹¹⁸ Letter from the Magistrate of Chittagong to the Commissioner of Chittagong, Chittagong Collectorate Records, 9 September 1857 Volume 258, Number 373, NAB.

¹¹⁹ Letter sent from C.T. Davidson, Commissioner of Circuit, Dacca Division, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 18 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 312, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹²⁰ Letter sent from Lieutenant William Harris to Cecil Beadon, Secretary to the Government of India dated 8 August 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 741, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

around Awadh.¹²¹ H.C. Wake, the Magistrate of Shahabad, had already informed Governor-General Canning in a report about Kunwar Singh's disaffection and 'treasonous activities' in and around the region.¹²² William Taylor, the District Judge of Shahabad, however contradicted the report about the infidelity of Kunwar Singh shortly thereafter.¹²³ But the fact that Kunwar Singh was involved in open mutiny against the colonial government was proved by July 1857 when the rebel sepoys attacked Arrah and placed themselves under Kunwar Singh's orders.¹²⁴ As a consequence the authorities in Dacca and also in Jalpaiguri, the Head-Quarter of the 73rd regiment, were visibly apprehensive about the connection between the disaffected sepoys of Arrah-Shahabad region and Dacca-Jalpaiguri. Any provocation, they believed, on the part of Kunwar Singh might escalate the disaffection of the sepoys belonging to 73rd into an open rebellion.¹²⁵ On 12 June 1857 a panic spread among the Europeans in consequence of a report to the effect that the two companies of the 73rd Native Infantry, which had left the station about the beginning of the month had met with some disbanded men from Barrackpore and had mutinied. It was said that these sepoys had returned to Dhaka and, joined by the fellow sepoys at Lal Bagh, they were looting the bazar, setting free the prisoners at

¹²¹ Letter sent from Mr J.D Gordon, Joint Magistrate at Julpigoree to the Secretary to the Government of India dated 28 August 1857, Secret and Political Consultations Number 422, 5 September, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

¹²² Letter sent from H.C. Wake Magistrate of Shahabad to the Secretary to the Government of India dated 8 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 36, 16 July 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹²³ Letter sent from William Taylor to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 14 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 98. 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹²⁴ Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*: p. 255.

¹²⁵ Letter sent from Mr. Jenkins, Magistrate of Dacca to Mr J.D Gordon, Joint Magistrate at Julpigoree dated 10 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 142, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

the Jail. A number of Europeans assembled at the house of Mr. Jenkins, the Magistrate, others resolved to defend themselves at the Bank.¹²⁶ Some of the women went on board boats on the river, arms were collected, and the whole town was in a state of excitement. Lieutenants McMohan and Rhynd, the Officers in command of the troops, started for the Lal Bagh, where the sepoys were located. On their return they reported that their men were all quiet and in their quarters and the alarm was groundless. On the evening drive, the natives who were collected in groups along the road seemed surprised to see them, after the report that the English had all left in a hurry, leaving them to their fate.¹²⁷ One can easily discern the stark resemblance of the nature of panic that gripped the colonial administration in Calcutta on the very same day. Also noticeable is the similarity of response from the administration and European population of the city in averting the crisis.

Alarmed by such rumours and the accompanying panic the government as a precautionary measure decided to set up a hundred men of the Indian Navy under Lieutenant Lewis, for the protection of the town.¹²⁸ They were located in the house on the opposite side of the road to the Baptist Chapel. Furthermore in a meeting held by the European and the East Indian inhabitants of the city capable of bearing arms, it was resolved to form two corps of volunteers – one of Infantry and the other

¹²⁶ F. B. Bradley Birt, *The Romance of an Eastern Capital*, London: Smith Elder and Co., 1906, p. 253. On the day of the first panic, Jenkins was the Magistrate, and Carnac the Collector. Subsequently Carnac was appointed Magistrate and Collector. At this time, Davidson was Commissioner, Abercrombie the Judge, Pearson Additional Judge, and Bainbridge Assistant Magistrate.

¹²⁷ "Panic in Dacca", *Hindoo Patriot*, 14 June 1857.

¹²⁸ Letter sent from the Officiating Joint Magistrate of Fureedpore to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 20 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 570, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

Cavalry.¹²⁹ In addition it was also decided to fortify the Mills that could, if the situation arises, withstand five to six thousand rebels. Also if the sepoys of the 73rd Regiment stationed at Jalpaiguri mutinied, then the sepoys in stationed in Dhaka would be at once disarmed. This apprehension amongst the officials in Dhaka was not without any foundation.

It was around this time that some of the sepoys of the 73rd Native Infantry stationed at Jalpaiguri in the Rajshahye Division already began showing signs of mutinous behaviour. It is important to mention in this context that the Head Quarters of the 73rd Regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry was situated in Jalpaiguri. The officials in Dhaka apprehended that if the sepoys at Jalpaiguri became rebellious, the fall-out would be disastrous in Dhaka.¹³⁰ In the month of July a plan was revealed amongst the sepoys of the 73rd Native Infantry to take the lives of their officers, or that of any Europeans as opportunity should occur. The plot was disclosed by the Havildar who initially pretended to join the rebel sepoys but later shot one of them through the head and apprehended the others.¹³¹ The names of men in the 73rd Native Infantry were given up and two of the three men were at once quietly arrested, when

¹²⁹ Letter sent from C.J. Davidson, Commissiner of Dacca Division to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 1 July 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 742, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA; Letter sent from E.J. Smith Superintendent to C.J. Carnac, Magistrate of Dacca dated 16 July 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number: 745 (2), 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA. Also see: Arthur Lloyd Clay, *Leaves from a Diary in Lower Bengal*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1896, Appendix B.

¹³⁰ Letter sent from Lieutenant William Harris to Cecil Beadon, Secretary to the Government of India dated 8 August 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 741, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA

¹³¹ Letters From James Gordon, Joint Magistrate in Charge of the Sub-Division of Julpigoree to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Julpigoree 24 August 1857, Judicial Proceeding Number 382, Letter Number 73, 24 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

it was discovered that the information given was correct.¹³² The following month another plot was discovered, and this time amongst the men of the 11th Irregular Cavalry, who had bound themselves by the most solemn oaths, that they would not leave the cantonment in Dhaka before they had destroyed all the ‘Sahib Logs’.¹³³ The Jamadar of one of the troops was allegedly at the head of it who explained to the ‘conspirators’ that there was no occasion for hasty action, but that they were to remain quiet till he, who was watching his opportunity, should ‘order them and that then they should be prompt and unanimous in executing the work of death.’¹³⁴ The Joint Magistrate of Jalpaiguri in his letter to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal expressed his deep concern regarding the whole affair. In this context he wrote,

This was of course rather startling because it was clearly the only proper way to destroy the Europeans. Everyone here is armed, and so an attack by one or two men, or even more would probably fail, but a body of twenty or thirty attacking the Europeans when scattered and unsuspecting, could not but succeed.¹³⁵

As a result a court martial was immediately ordered for the following day, and the suspected Jamadar was placed on the court. Three of the ‘conspirators’ were tried convicted, sentenced for imprisonment for life and sent to Calcutta in handcuffs and

¹³² Judicial Proceeding Number 691, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹³³ Letters From James Gordon, Joint Magistrate in Charge of the Sub-Division of Julpigoree to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Julpigoree 24 August 1857, Judicial Proceeding Number 382, Letter Number 73, 24 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹³⁴ Letters From James Gordon, Joint Magistrate in Charge of the Sub-Division of Julpigoree to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Julpigoree 24 August 1857, Judicial Proceeding Number 382, Letter Number 73, 24 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹³⁵ Letters From James Gordon, Joint Magistrate in Charge of the Sub-Division of Julpigoree to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Julpigoree 24 August 1857, Judicial Proceeding Number 382, Letter Number 73, 24 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

irons. However, the arrival of a party of one hundred seamen from the H.C.S. Zenobia with two armed pinnaces in the month of July restored some confidence among the Europeans.¹³⁶

This relative quietude however did not last long enough. The first three days of August was the Bakri Eid, which put the government again in a state of panic since the government apprehended that any kind of large congregation of Muslims might cause some disturbance. As a precautionary measure, the volunteers were all put on alert and patrols were out all night on each of the three days of the Eid. Great alarm existed amongst the European and Armenian residents, especially among those with families, on hearing the news of the massacres from the Gangetic heartland that were already filtering down in Dhaka.¹³⁷ This was immediately followed by the Hindu festival of 'Jummo Ostomee' and the Muslim occasion of Muharram, together which put the town once again in a state of panic throughout the month of August.¹³⁸ Both these festivals had large congregation of followers. The administration, under the prevailing circumstances, was naturally apprehensive regarding such an assemblage. As a consequence, during the days of the festival, the European cavalry officers were mounted on elephants and along with the infantry were well armed and ready for anything that might occur.¹³⁹ In the end though, everything passed off relatively quietly. But rumours and unverified reports of various sorts were continuously

¹³⁶ Letter sent from A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Commissioner of Dacca dated 12 September 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 185, 24 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹³⁷ *Excerpts* from the Diary of Dr. Brennand, Principal of the Dhaka College, in Clay, *Leaves from a Diary in Lower Bengal*. See Appendix D for further details.

¹³⁸ 'Jummo Ostomee', or 'Krishna Janmashtami' as it is known in northern India, is a Hindu festival, celebrating the birthday of Lord Krishna, the eighth incarnation of the god Lord Vishnu.

¹³⁹ Clay, *Leaves from a Diary in Lower Bengal*.

coming from Calcutta that kept the tension unhindered amongst the administration throughout the month. *The Dacca News* reported on 17 August 1857 that the mutinous sepoys were ‘pouring into Calcutta...that armed boats swarm in the Hoogly... Constantly Raneegunge is reported burnt to the ground and the railways destroyed...’¹⁴⁰

The civil population had no clue what was going on or about to happen. The Magistrate of Dhaka even went to the extent of forming something like a ‘Committee of Public Safety’ amongst the native residents and proposed that the Muslim residents of the city should ‘supplicate *Allah Tala* to protect the present *Kafir* (Infidel) Government, and that the *Kutbah* be read in the name of His Honour, the lieutenant Governor of Bengal, and not his majesty of Delhi.’¹⁴¹ In addition, the influential Muslim residents ‘who used to keep a regular correspondence with the leading men amongst the co-religionists in the North-West and were subscribed to Urdu and Persian newspapers’ were also requested to report immediately ‘should they become acquainted with any indications of a rebellious spirit in the district.’¹⁴² Similarly the Hindu residents of the city were also requested to ‘set about in right earnest to make Shama Poojah and Sanckirtons’ throughout the station.’¹⁴³ These

¹⁴⁰ “The Mutinies”, *The Dacca News*, 22 August 1857, p. 341. *The Dacca News* was the weekly English newspaper that started publishing in 1856. The Founder-Editor of the newspaper was Alexander Forbes, who was later appointed as the Editor of *Bengal Hurkaru* newspaper. There were five owners of the *Dacca Press* who were also the owners of the newspaper: A.M. Cameron, N.P. Pogose, J.A. Greig, J.P. Wise, and K.A. Gani. Among several other newspapers that were either temporarily censored or warned for being critical towards the colonial administrative policies, *Dacca News* was one of them.

¹⁴¹ “Unusual Excitement in Dacca”, *The Dacca News*, 22 August 1857, p. 340; ‘*Kutbah*’, or ‘*Khutbah*’, a religious sermon delivered to the public according to Islamic tradition.

¹⁴² “Unusual Excitement in Dacca”, *The Dacca News*, 22 August 1857, p. 340.

¹⁴³ “Unusual Excitement in Dacca”, *The Dacca News*, 22 August 1857, p. 340.

kinds of odd requests perplexed the residents who failed to comprehend as to why the authorities were suddenly asking them to perform such rituals: 'What has happened that the Sahebs should order us to make new images, and new Poojahs?'¹⁴⁴ Some of them even began to wonder that 'the Sahebs must be in possession of information regarding some invisible calamity, which their blunt intellect cannot perceive.'¹⁴⁵ Quite clearly, at a time when the administration was supposed to put up a strong and effective resistance in order to calm down the prevailing tension amongst the civil population of the region, these kinds of superstitious acts on their part worsened the situation. As the *Dacca News* surmised towards its concluding section of the article, these kinds of actions on the part administration, in otherwise 'ordinary times' would have been perfectly harmless. However under the present situation 'the ill-effects of popular rumours on the native mind' should have been checked by 'the prudent, firm, but silent actions of the Europeans'.¹⁴⁶ The important point that once again emerges from the above discussion is that under a given situation rumour and subsequent panic has the potential to adversely affect the rational thinking capacity of the colonial administration, thereby taking recourse to such superstitious actions.

A somewhat minor furore was created in September when the detachment of sailors sent on the expedition to Assam arrived at Dhaka but refused to proceed any further. Barring a few deserters the rest were persuaded to go to Assam where their presence was considered necessary in view of a rapidly deteriorating situation. Dhaka remained relatively quiet for a month or so. However, this relative quietude

¹⁴⁴ "Unusual Excitement in Dacca", *The Dacca News*, 22 August 1857, p. 340.

¹⁴⁵ "Unusual Excitement in Dacca", *The Dacca News*, 22 August 1857, p. 340.

¹⁴⁶ "The Forts in Bengal", *The Dacca News*, 22 August 1857, p. 349.

was once again shattered by the state of affairs which lasted the whole of November. In the beginning of November something like a panic occurred which was caused by the removal of the sailors to the house near the church that was previously been occupied by the nuns.¹⁴⁷ The sepoys got the ammunition out of the magazine, and the government perceived that the outbreak of rebellion was imminent.¹⁴⁸ These sepoys were also reportedly in touch with the sepoys in Jalpaiguri, asking them to resist if an attempt was made to disarm them. Although the officials were relatively sure of their safety while disarming the sepoys in Dhaka, they feared the possible disastrous effects that could have on the troops stationed at Chittagong, Sylhet and Jalpaiguri.¹⁴⁹ The officials believed that if they tried to preserve the order in Dhaka, the other places would remain quiet.

On 21 November, 1857 the intelligence of the Chittagong mutiny reached Dhaka and the principal civil and military authorities at once assembled to consider what precaution should be taken to prevent the sepoys at Dhaka from following the example.¹⁵⁰ The Magistrate of Dhaka, Mr. Jenkins, strongly believed that the Chittagong mutineers were in communication with the 73rd regiments in Dhaka, and

¹⁴⁷ "Excerpts from the diary of Dr. Brennand" in Clay, *Leaves from a Diary in Lower Bengal*; Letter sent from the Commissioner of Dhaka to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 9 November 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number 36, 22 November 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁴⁸ Excerpts from the diary of Dr. Brennand in Clay, *Leaves from a Diary in Lower Bengal*; Letter sent from the Commissioner of Dhaka to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 9 November 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number 36, 22 November 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁴⁹ Letter sent from the Commissioner of Dhaka to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 9 November 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number 36, 22 November 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁵⁰ Special Narrative of Events dated December 12, 1857, Enclosure 1 in Number 6, Papers presented to both the Houses of Parliament, p. 332, BLOC; also see: Charles Rathbone Low, *History of the Indian Navy, 1613-1863*, London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1877, pp. 438-42.

together they were ‘plotting to massacre the district, break open the treasury and the ammunitions, and then head towards Arrah in order to join their fellow comrades.’¹⁵¹ Although the above mentioned conviction of the Magistrate could not be verified, the communication between the sepoy regiments, more so as they were recruited from the same areas, stationed in the nearby districts were not that uncommon. The apprehension was also reflected in an editorial of *Hindoo Patriot*, which noted:

Mutiny has reappeared in the extreme east of the empire. The three companies of the 34th N.I. at Chittagong have risen, released the prisoners in the jail, plundered the local treasury of about three lacs of rupees, and made off for Dacca...they are evidently in communication with the detachment of 73rd N.I. at Dacca.¹⁵²

It was further reported that the remnant of the 34th Native Infantry, the regiment disbanded at Barrackpore, had broken out and that they had looted the treasury, taking with them about three hundred thousand rupees, killing several Europeans in the course.¹⁵³ At once the district administration, in consultation with the military authorities, decided that as a precautionary measure the sepoys at Dhaka, the 73rd Native Infantry were to be disarmed the very next day.¹⁵⁴ The Commissioner of Dhaka, C.T. Davidson, remarked apprehensively that ‘time has now arrived when no alternative remains but to disarm the troops here, for should the Chittagong

¹⁵¹ Letter sent from the Magistrate of Dacca to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 24 November 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number 233, 2 December 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁵² “The Rebellion”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 26 November 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 199.

¹⁵³ “Our Battle”, *The Dacca News*, 28 November 1857, p. 507.

¹⁵⁴ Letter sent from the Commissioner of Dhaka, C.T. Davidson to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Dhaka 21 November 1857, Letter Number 24 November 1857, Numbers 42 and 43, Home Public Proceedings Number 4 December 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI; “The Rebellion”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 3 December 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 208.

Detachment manage to form a junction with the two Companies of the 73rd Regiment here, we should have to fight five hundred men with arms in their hands instead of three hundred.¹⁵⁵ 73rd Native Infantry was under the command of Lieutenant Dowell and were about 260 in number, including the 26 artillerymen.¹⁵⁶ They had in their possession two field pieces, and in their lines they had a remarkably strong position.¹⁵⁷ On hearing the decision of the authorities, the sepoys belonging to the 73rd Native Infantry threatened to resist any attempt at disarming them and also to despise the sailors, who were generally of smaller stature, and were about ninety in number. The officers in charge decided to tread with caution so as to prevent any excitement among the sepoys. The next day, it was decided, that the officials would begin by first disarming the Treasury Guard and to place the disarmed men in the charge of the Volunteers.¹⁵⁸ The sailors would then proceed to Lal Bagh and it was hoped that the men over there would give up their arms without much opposition.

Before going into the further details of the struggle that ensued in Dhaka, it would be interesting here to briefly describe the place where the conflagration took place. Lal Bagh fort complex (also known as the Fort Aurangabad, later renamed as Bahadur Shah Park) was the ruins of the incomplete Mughal fortress near the bank of

¹⁵⁵ Letter sent from the Commissioner of Dhaka, C.J. Davidson to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Dhaka 21 November 1857, Letter Number 24 November 1857, Numbers 42 and 43, Home Public Proceedings Number 4 December 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁵⁶ "Our Battle", *The Dacca News*, 28 November 1857, p. 507. Charles Rathbone Low however mentioned that the 73rd Regiment in Dhaka consisted of three hundred native army, supported by fifty native artillerymen, with two field-pieces and a well-stocked magazine of ammunition. Low, *History of the Indian Navy, 1613-1863*: p. 439.

¹⁵⁷ Letter sent from C.J. Davidson, Commissiner of Dacca Division to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 22 November 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number 322, 28 November 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA; Clay, *Leaves from a Diary in Lower Bengal*.

¹⁵⁸ "Our Battle", *The Dacca News*, 28 November 1857, p. 507.

the Buriganga River, in the south-western part of Dhaka.¹⁵⁹ By the time the rebellion broke out, there was but little of it that remained with the exception of a great mound of ruins, extending for about five hundred yards, with its southern front towards the river.¹⁶⁰ The barracks for the sepoy was later built upon this structure.¹⁶¹ At the right angle, towards the west, there ran a high wall that was the part of the old palace. The other two sides were enclosed by low walls. In a line running from the east westwards, in the middle of the enclosure was a large tank, next to the two storied hospital, and behind that was the Beebee Pari's tomb, a mosque of considerable size. Behind the mosque were the gun-sheds that had two fine six-pounders with about 26 artillerymen.¹⁶²



Plate 1: Entrance to the Lal Bagh Fort complex.

Source: Arthur L. Clay, *Leaves from a Diary in Lower Bengal*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1896.

¹⁵⁹ Syed Muhammed Taifoor, *Glimpses of Old Dhaka: A Short Historical Narration of East Bengal and Aassam [Sic] with Special Treatment of Dhaka*, Dacca: S.M. Perwez, 1965.

¹⁶⁰ "Our Battle," *The Dacca News*, 28 November 1857, p. 507.

¹⁶¹ Low, *History of the Indian Navy, 1613-1863*: p. 440.

¹⁶² The detailed description of the inside of the Lal Bagh Fort has been taken from the report entitled "Our Battle" published in *The Dacca News*, 28 November 1857, p. 507.

The above mentioned plan was successful to an extent. When the volunteers advanced towards the quarters after disarming the others, the sepoys there appeared dejected and reproached their officers for subjecting them to such disgrace, protesting that ‘they would have given up their arms at once to their officers had they only been asked to do so.’¹⁶³ However, as the sailors marched towards Lal Bagh to disarm the sepoys over there, they had to face fierce opposition from the sepoys.¹⁶⁴ The hospitals and numerous other buildings in the Lal Bagh, together with the barracks which were on the top of a hill were completely occupied by the native sepoys in great force. The sepoys stationed over there immediately opened fire towards the approaching forces. One of the sailors were shot dead by the sentry, which was then followed by the others, and a volley was fired on the sailors as they tried to advance through the broken wall near the southern gateway. The guns were placed in position in front of the BeeBee Pari’s tomb, so as to command the entrance.¹⁶⁵ After a sharp exchange of gunfire, which lasted half an hour, the sepoys were eventually turned out of their barracks. The magistrate reported that at the end forty one sepoys lay dead on the ground. ‘Some more were shot or drowned in attempting to escape and 70 or 80 are believed to have been wounded.’¹⁶⁶ On the Company’s side fifteen were severely and three slightly wounded. ‘Of the former

¹⁶³ Home Public Proceedings Number 536, 4 December 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁶⁴ The day-to-day happenings of this memorable event were recorded by Mr. Brennand, the then Principal of Dacca College. For further details see the Appendix “Excerpts from the Diary of Dr. Brennand, Principal of the Dhaka College”, in Clay, *Leaves from a Diary in Lower Bengal*.

¹⁶⁵ “Our Battle”, *The Dacca News*, 28 November 1857, p. 507.

¹⁶⁶ Clay, *Leaves from a Diary in Lower Bengal*.

three have since died of their wounds. Dr. Green the Civil Surgeon of the station and Lieutenant Lewis who commanded the sailors were amongst the wounded.’¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Special Narrative of Events, Dated December 12, 1857, Enclosure 1 in Number 6, Papers presented to both the Houses of the Parliament, pp.: 332-333, BLOC.

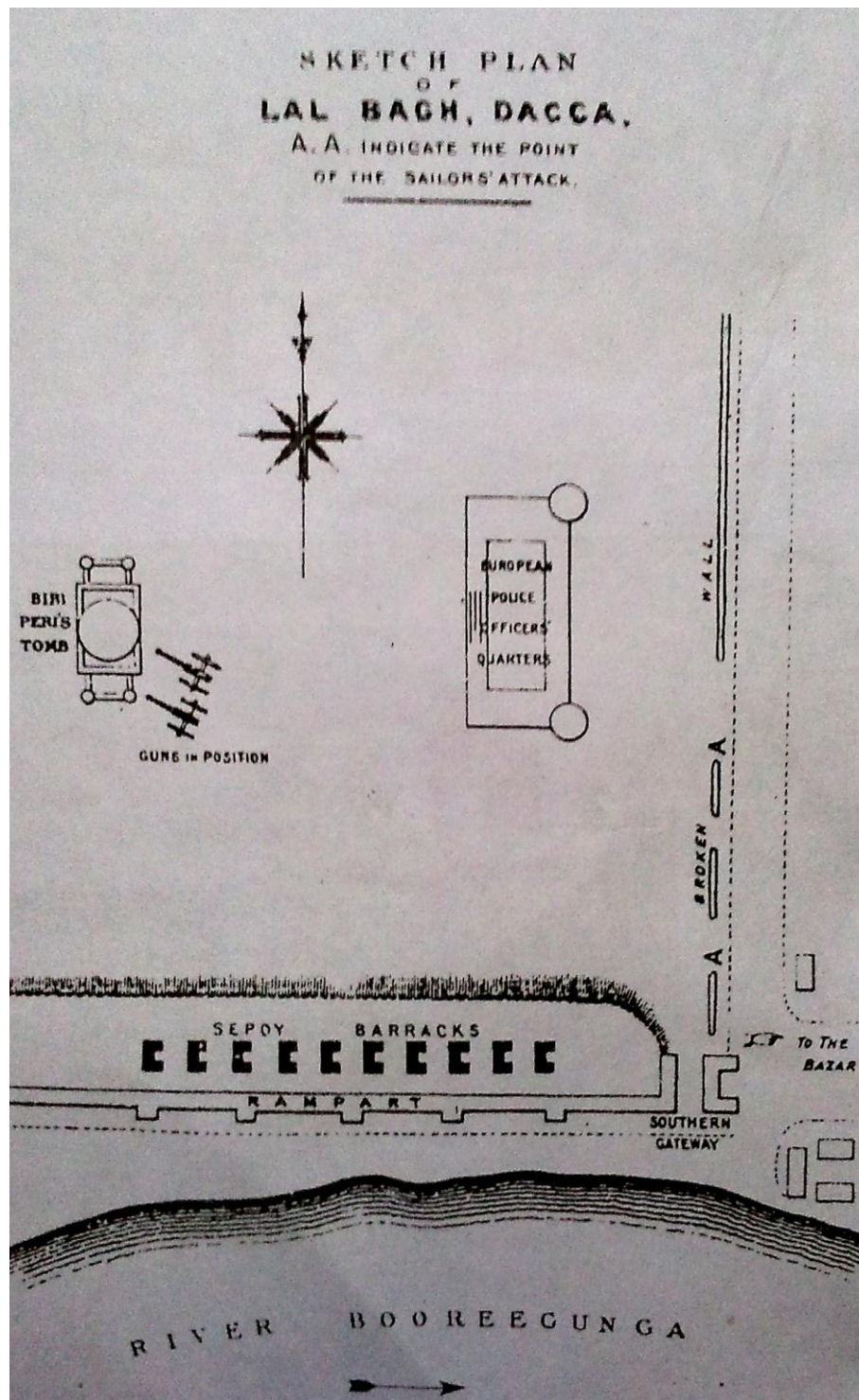


Plate 2: Sketch Plan of the Fort of Lal Bagh during the Uprising of 1857 in Dhaka.

Source: Arthur L. Clay, *Leaves from a Diary in Lower Bengal*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1896.

Once the sepoy were overpowered, the sailors and the volunteer guards took charge of the treasury. The disarmed sepoy broke up into small detached parties and tried to escape to different directions. Some twenty of them were captured, ten of whom were hanged soon after.¹⁶⁸ Reinforcement of European sailors and officers were immediately sent from Calcutta to restore confidence among the Europeans. However, the fear and apprehension amongst the European population of the city lasted for several months and were found 'sleeping with revolvers under their pillows and their loaded guns by their bed-sides, ready for immediate use.'¹⁶⁹ In a somewhat later account, Hridaya Nath Majumdar wrote,

...all of them were put to the gallows and the Dacca Mutiny was thus terminated. The Antaghar Maidan being the scene of this tragical occurrences, used to be looked upon with awe by the people of Dhaka, and many superstitious stories were used to be narrated by the people of the surrounding Mahallas – Bangla Bazaar, Shankhari Bazaar, and Kalta Bazaar how the spirits of the departed sepoy used to visit the Maidan during the night and how the groans and awful sounds were used to be heard. These stories were used to be told by the old people and we never dared to go the Maidan after the evening. Thus, in this way the Dacca Mutiny ended.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ "Our Battle", *The Dacca News*, 28 November 1857, p. 507.

¹⁶⁹ Low, *History of the Indian Navy, 1613-1863*, Vol. 2: p. 444.

¹⁷⁰ Hridaya Nath Majumdar, *The Reminiscences of Dacca*, Calcutta: Bangla Academy, 1926, p. 23.

Meanwhile the main body of the Dhaka rebels passed through Mymensingh and reached the district of Rungpore.¹⁷¹ By the end of November, the Magistrate of Mymensingh reported that a party of about one hundred and fifty sepoy passed through that station, having committed some depredations on their route, without attacking the station.¹⁷² In the beginning of January 1858, Lieutenant E.R. Wilcox of 73rd Native Infantry stationed at Jalpaiguri reported that the Dhaka mutineers were on their way to Bhutan and were aided and assisted by the Bhutan Subah in general and in particular by a person called Hurrah Singh, a zamindar residing near the Bhutan border.¹⁷³ It is to be noted that as early as in August 1857 the Superintendent of Darjeeling had informed the government about the 'intriguing communications' between the sepoy of the 73rd regiment and the local magnates around the border of Bhutan.¹⁷⁴ But since nothing could be proven at that time the authorities had to content themselves by keeping a close watch on the regiments in Jalpaiguri. Hurrah Singh was commonly known as the Hathea Rajah as he had for many years farmed the right to catch elephants in Bhutan. On receiving the report in January 1858 about the assistance provided by the Rajah, detachments were sent immediately to arrest him. But as British force reached Churabandi, a village near where the Rajah was

¹⁷¹ Letter sent from A. Campbell Superintendent of Darjeeling to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 5 December 1857, Foreign Department Proceedings Number 343, 18 December 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁷² Special Narrative of Events, Dated December 12, 1857, Enclosure 1 in Number 6, Papers presented to both the Houses of the Parliament, p. 333, BLOC.

¹⁷³ Further Papers Number 8 in Continuation of Number 6, Relative to the Insurrection in the East Indies, Presented to both the Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1858, Enclosure 81 and 82 in Number 2, pp.: 69-70, BLOC.

¹⁷⁴ Letter sent from A. Campbell Superintendent of Darjeeling to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Foreign Department Proceedings Number 598 SC dated 21 August 1857, 25 September 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

staying, the officer commanding the force realised that the Rajah had been warned by men from within his own army and that he had managed to escape.¹⁷⁵ After about an hour of pursuit in vain the British officials finally gave up, having succeeded in taking two of Hurrah Singh's dependents. The two men who they believed were the informants were put under confinement. According to the deposition of the convicts, the Rajah was planning to gather the mutinous sepoy of the 73rd regiment and, along with his own resources, would march towards Julpaiguri to take control of the headquarter of the 73rd.¹⁷⁶ The convicts were eventually tried on the ground of treachery, prosecuted and were blown away by guns.

The mutineers of the 73rd regiment eventually moved out of Bhutan and having passed through Darjeeling entered Nepal terrain.¹⁷⁷ The Commissioner of Bhagalpur reported in details the route that the mutineers of the 73rd regiment followed on their way to Nepal.¹⁷⁸ It is interesting to note from the correspondence of the Commissioner that the mutineers received uninterrupted support from the villages through which they crossed. The covert assistance provided by the villages was further verified when the colonial officials, who were following the movement

¹⁷⁵ Letter sent from Lieutenant Wilcox to the Secretary to the Government of India dated 14 February 1858, Foreign Department Proceedings Number 650, 12 March 1858, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁷⁶ Deposition of the convicts as recorded by the Superintendent of Darjeeling dated 26 January 1858, Secret and Political Consultations Number 32-4, 22 March 1858, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

¹⁷⁷ Letter from A. Campbell, Superintendent of Darjeeling to G.F. Edmonstone, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Foreign Department Proceedings Number 342 dated 26 January 1858, Government of Bengal, NAI; Letter sent from the Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of India Foreign Department dated 28 January 1858, Foreign Department Proceedings Number 185-86, 26 February 1858, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁷⁸ Letter from the Commissioner of Bhagalpur to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 2 January 1858, Foreign Department Proceedings Number 185-86, 26 February 1858, Government of Bengal, NAI.

of the mutinous 73rd regiment closely, enquired the whereabouts of the rebels almost immediately after they left the villages, but the villagers denied having any information.¹⁷⁹ Kaye and Malleson informed us that the mutineers eventually succeeded in making their way into the north-east of Awadh ‘only eventually to fall by the bullet and the sword’.¹⁸⁰ Although the information provided by Kaye and Malleson cannot be corroborated, it seems plausible to infer from the report of the Commissioner of Bhagalpur that the mutineers were indeed moving westwards along the Nepal terai area.¹⁸¹

3.6 THE NAVAL BRIGADE: SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT DURING THE REBELLION

Before concluding this chapter it would be interesting to discuss in brief the significance and impact of the Naval Brigade, which played a vital part during the uprising of 1857, especially in the lower province of the Bengal Presidency. As the rebellion assumed momentum, what haunted the colonial administration was the insignificant number of the ruling community in comparison to the vast native population of the country, which added to their fear, anxieties and apprehension. It was roughly estimated that if every insurgent or every mutineer was to be put to death or transported beyond the sea, the administration would require a minimum of two hundred thousand European soldiers. This was quite impossible a task for the

¹⁷⁹ Letter from the Commissioner of Bhagalpur to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 2 January 1858, Foreign Department Proceedings Number 185-86, 26 February 1858, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁸⁰ Kaye and Malleson, *Kaye's and Malleson's History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-8*: p. 304.

¹⁸¹ Letter from the Commissioner of Bhagalpur to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 2 January 1858, Foreign Department Proceedings Number 185-86, 26 February 1858, Government of Bengal, NAI.

colonial government under the present circumstances. It might be remembered that it was around the same time that the British were engaged in heavy fighting with the mutineers in many districts of the northern Gangetic heartland that required a regular supply of European soldiers. In spite of repeated appeal to the higher authorities in England, the government in India could not get adequate numbers of European soldiers. However, under the present situation, it was absolutely essential for the government to have as many European soldiers, trained or untrained, as possible. The purpose was to have a visible overall presence of armed European men to 'overawe' the sepoys and other disgruntled sections of the native population. In view of the paucity of the trained European men, the colonial government decided to recruit the so-called 'outcast' European sailors as a temporary emergency measure.¹⁸²

For many decades, the relationship between the wealthier part of the white society of British India and the infamous sea-men had been ambiguous. The British sea-faring men possessed the reputation of being a source of annoyance, troublesome and were considered as a shame rather than pride, at least when they were on shore. Their affinity for drink and prostitution and their notoriously 'unruly conduct' towards the native population posed a real threat against the ideological substructures of British rule.¹⁸³ In fact in the eyes of the colonial administration, as Harald Fischer-Tiné pointed out, their alleged lack of discipline and 'reckless and irrational ways' brought them close to the 'uncivilised natives'. To fit these otherwise 'intruders' and 'outcasts' in the 'superior ruling self' the imperial authority tried and experimented

¹⁸² Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Low and Licentious Europeans: Race, Class and 'White Subalternity' in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009.

¹⁸³ See chapter 2: "Flotsam and Jetsam of the Empire? European Seamen and Spaces of Disease and Disorder in Colonial Calcutta" in Fischer-Tiné, *Low and Licentious Europeans*, p. 91.

with all sorts of devices.¹⁸⁴ Their number and mode of presence was adjusted according to the requirements of the empire.

During the crisis of 1857, most of the European soldiers who were available had to be sent to the more active theatres of action across northern India. As a result there were not many Europeans available in the lower Province of Bengal during the time. It was because of this reason that the colonial government had to indiscriminately recruit these European sailors with high pay and other benefits.¹⁸⁵ As has been discussed in the previous chapter, in the weeks following the outbreak in Meerut and in Delhi, Governor General Canning agreed reluctantly to call for, in addition to the formation of the volunteer corps, more than 350 seamen who were asked to assist the police in case of need.¹⁸⁶ Later in the month, the Governor General in Council also sanctioned the proposal of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal to raise a 'body of 200 or 250 European Seamen' for the service in the various districts of Bengal. Considering the geographical and political situation in the lower province of Bengal, especially in the eastern Bengal region which was mostly riverine, the necessity of imparting military training to them was stressed: 'it is evident that, unless to some extent drilled and instructed before they leave, bodies of seamen picked up indiscriminately out of the merchant ships in the port, could not be much

¹⁸⁴ Fischer-Tiné, *Low and Licentious Europeans*: pp. 91-92.

¹⁸⁵ In a letter to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal the Marine Office in Fort William writes, '...I have ascertained from the Officiating Registrar of Merchant Seamen that there are not a hundred Seamen to be found in the town of Calcutta... and I beg to suggest that as many men as can be procured within the limits mentioned be entered by the officers of the Indian Navy now in Port and when a number is collected that a party be despatched to the district locality under the command of officers, as the *only* means of ensuring their steadiness and obedience.' Judicial Proceeding Number: 230 Number Letter Number: 5030, 17 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁸⁶ Government of Bengal, Marine Proceedings, 1859, IOR: P/213/50, OIOC.

relied on...¹⁸⁷ In the months of June and July, the first units of Indian Navy Seamen arrived in Calcutta and shortly afterwards, three ships from the Royal Navy reached the port.¹⁸⁸ Although it is difficult to estimate the total number of troops recruited during the period of the uprising, but it might be safely assumed that there were between 2000 and 2500 armed European seamen between northern India and Burma by the end of 1858.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Judicial Proceedings Number 29, 26 November 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁸⁸ William Laird Clowes, *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to the Death of Queen Victoria*, 7 vols., London: Sampson Low, 1903.

¹⁸⁹ Low, *History of the Indian Navy, 1613-1863*: p. 492.

TABLE 6

Strength, Armament and Stations of the Detachments of the Indian Naval Brigade Serving in Bengal, during the Indian Mutiny, between June 1857, and May 1860, under the Command of Captain C.D. Campbell, Senior Naval Officer, Calcutta and commanding pennant vessel 'Calcutta':

NUMBER	STRENGTH			GUNS	STATION
	OFFICERS	WARRANT OFFICERS	PETTY OFFICERS AND SEAMEN		
1	6	2	150	-	Fort William
2	3	2	100	6	Barrackpore
3	4	1	100	4	Buxar
4	4	1	100	2	Dacca & Dibrooghur
5	5	1	200	6	Gya
6	5	1	200	-	Port Blair
7	4	1	110	4	Dehree
8	3	0	50	-	Jessore
9	5	1	120	4	Chyabassa
10	3	1	100	2	Alipore
11	4	1	100	2	Moozufferpore & Moteeharee
12	4	1	100	2	Julpigoree
13	3	1	100	2	Chuprah
14	4	1	100	2	Chyabassa
POLICE BRIGADE	3	1	110	4	Dibrooghur
TOTAL	60	16	1740	40	

Source: Charles Rathbone Low, *History of the Indian Navy 1613-1863, in two Volumes*, vol. 2, London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1877, Appendix: B, p. 585.

From the table above it becomes clear that most of these naval brigades that were operating during the rebellion of 1857 were posted in the lower province of Bengal. Historians have repeatedly stressed the crucial role played by the Naval Brigade in

suppressing the rebellion.¹⁹⁰ Rathbone Low for instance, tried to argue the decisiveness of the Naval Brigades by their sheer presence in and around Calcutta which to a large extent helped the European population to overcome their panic. As he wrote, ‘In this time of doubt and expectation... the welcome presence of the crews on shore ... restored the confidence among the Europeans and stuck terror into the hearts of the plotters and the Budmashes.’¹⁹¹ However, it was not only the native ‘budmashes and mutineers’ who were terrorised by presence of these naval Brigades, but they often caused trouble for the colonial authorities as well as for the general European population and the natives alike. As the Commissioner of Police reported:

These men, who have been accumulating during the last six months, have given the public at large and the Police little trouble, and the offences they have seldom exceeded drunken brawls and pugilistic encounters... I confess however that I look for wars with some apprehension to the discharge in Calcutta of at least six hundred more seamen, most of them raised in a hurry, and many of them of very worst character. As long as they have money, nothing worse perhaps will ensue than drunken quarrels in the streets, but when they are destitute of cash and credit and without hope of employment, for in the present state of trade there is little chance of a quarter of the number being shipped for months, I should not be surprised if gangs

¹⁹⁰ William Bevill Rowbotham, *The Naval Brigades in the Indian Mutiny, 1857-58*, Publications of the Navy Records Society, London: Printed for the Navy Records Society, 1947; Low, *History of the Indian Navy, 1613-1863*. For more recent example see Richard Brookes, “Naval Brigades into India; the Relief of Lucknow 1857-59,” in Captain Peter Hore (ed.), *Sea Power Ashore: 200 Years of Royal Navy Operations on Land*, London: Naval Institute Press, 2001.

¹⁹¹ Rowbotham, *The Naval Brigades in the Indian Mutiny, 1857-58*: p. 494. The term ‘Budmash’ denotes a person following evil courses for his livelihood. Sir Henry Yule, A. C. Burnell, and William Crooke, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical, and Discursive*, London: John Murray, 1903.

were formed for the purpose of robbery. As far as Calcutta is concerned, the European police in my opinion is strong enough to put a summery end to anything of the kind, but there is nothing that I know to prevent Europeans plundering in the mofussil with impunity.¹⁹²

Part of this problem relating to the government's dilemma regarding the indiscriminate recruitment of the Europeans arose from the fact that not every Brigade was 'a gallant body of men, gallantly led'.¹⁹³ The situation was made more complicated by the fact that the legal status of these troops was not clear. In most cases they were backed by the military authorities, which in turn gave rise to bitter complaints from the Commissioner of Police in Calcutta.¹⁹⁴ It was therefore natural that these men 'not being amendable to martial laws or accustomed to strict discipline' were found to be 'uncontrollable' when posted in the districts of Bengal.¹⁹⁵ In Jessore, for instance, a detachment of the Naval Brigade, also known as the 'Jahazis' in local dialect, were sent in order to bring the district under control. In the words of W.S. Seton-Karr, the officiating Civil and Sessions Judge of Jessore, these seamen were in reality 'a collection of discharged sailors and loafers, of various kind and nationalities, picked up from the bazaars of Calcutta... who understood very little of any native language and of native ways.'¹⁹⁶ The Commandant of the Brigade informed the authority of Jessore with the utmost gravity that 'on disembarking he

¹⁹² Judicial Proceedings Number 182, 3 March 1859, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁹³ S. Wanchope, Commissioner of Police, to the Town Major, Judicial Proceedings Number 293, 14 March 1859, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁹⁴ S. Wanchope, Commissioner of Police, to the Town Major, Judicial Proceedings Number 293, 14 March 1859, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁹⁵ Fischer-Tiné, *Low and Licentious Europeans*: p. 101.

¹⁹⁶ Seton-Karr, *A Short Account of Events During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857*: pp. 25-26.

formed his men in line, sent on scouts, and threw out skirmishers, as he imagined himself to be marching through an enemy's country.'¹⁹⁷ Quite predictably therefore, this kind of attitude on the part of the seamen caused terror and panic amongst the native population of the district. The stories of the activities of some of the drunkard 'Jahazis' and their avidity for women spread apprehension in the minds of the people. Admitting the panicky situation which aroused after hearing the news of the arrival of the naval brigade, the Magistrate of Pubna, in a letter to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal wrote:

It might be out of place here to mention that quite a panic prevails in this station in consequence of the expected advent of the sailors; about 1 ½ of the inhabitants have already gone away to villages in the interior or to a little distance off. The entire respectable female portions of the community are amongst the departed. No explanation or remonstrances tend to remove the impression which prevails that the sailors will commit every kind of outrage.¹⁹⁸

Reports of a similar nature also corroborate the fact that the undisciplined Naval Brigades caused havoc in the rural areas of certain districts, thereby creating panic in the minds of the people.¹⁹⁹ In the district of Jessore the villagers were rather baffled after hearing the bewildering stories of the habits of the seamen, or the 'Jahazis'. As a

¹⁹⁷ Seton-Karr, *A Short Account of Events During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857*: pp. 25-26.

¹⁹⁸ Letter from the Magistrate of Pubna to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 13 June 1858, Pubna District Records, Volume 230, Letter Number 320, p. 331, NAB.

¹⁹⁹ One such report reveals the fact that these European Seamen put some of the houses on fire and fired indiscriminately towards the villagers in the district of Pubna. Letters to the Superintendent of the Naval Brigade from the Magistrate of Pubna, 6th July 1858, Pubna District Records, Volume 230, NAB.

consequence, all the markets in the line of the march of these seamen were kept closed or were deserted. The closure of the markets added further trouble for the natives, as the prices of the commodities increased manifold because of the shortage of supply. The native newspaper *Sambad Prabhakar* lamented the fact that ‘as a consequence of the arrival of the Naval Brigade in the country the prices of foods have gone high, almost doubled. The poor natives of the country are left with little or no food. The sea-men are looting the foods from everywhere, forcing the natives to starve’.²⁰⁰ Similarly, in a letter to *The Englishman*, a native Christian from Buxar, complained that the conducts of these seamen around that place were becoming quite unbearable in view of the fact that it was ‘quite common for them to force themselves even at the hours of Twelve and One in the night into the houses of respectable families’ to harass the women and insult the male family members as ‘*Niggers*’.²⁰¹ Even in the city of Calcutta the unruly conduct of the Naval Brigades were far from exemplary: the detachment on the Mint Guard, for instance, was found to be ‘in the habit of committing robberies on native shop-keepers’ and had to be stopped by the Police.²⁰² On the whole, the regular detachments seem to have been frequently involved in ‘criminal ’or‘ uproarious incidents’ and the authorities had to take a great deal of trouble to discipline and educate the sailors.²⁰³ Thus, although the Naval Brigade did play a significant part in suppressing the rebellion and the colonial government benefitted from them during the whole crisis, especially in the eastern

²⁰⁰ *Sambad Prabhakar*, 6 July 1857, p. 4. The Translation from the original Bengali text is mine.

²⁰¹ Quoted in *The Englishman*, 15 January 1859, p. 2.

²⁰² Brigadier W.G. Brown, Commanding at Calcutta to S. Wanchope, Commissioner of Police, Calcutta 30 November 1858, Letter Number 48, Government of India, Marine Consultations 1859, OIOC.

²⁰³ A ‘Regular’ detachment was composed mostly of seamen belonging to the Indian Navy.

part of the lower province of the Bengal presidency, it did come with a price tag.²⁰⁴ These seamen became really infamous throughout the Province and were despised as a 'set of thieves and vagabonds' by their fellow countrymen.²⁰⁵ They were considered to be 'the terror of friends as well as foes' even in the English Press.²⁰⁶ As a consequence therefore, as soon as the rebellion came to a close and the armed forces were reorganised, most of these seamen who were recruited hastily, were discharged to Australia or Britain, as the 'ill-consequences of their staying on would be great'.²⁰⁷ It was only after these sailors were ordered back to Calcutta and broken up subsequently, that the government felt some relief.²⁰⁸ This policy of hastily recruiting and then discharging these seamen on the part of the colonial government eventually led to a greater problem of European vagrancy in India.²⁰⁹ But this is beyond the purview of our present discussion.

²⁰⁴ Sarmistha De, "Marginal Whites and the Great Uprising: A Case Study of the Bengal Presidency", in Andrea Major and Crispin Bates (eds.) *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Vol. 2: Britain and the Indian Uprising, London: Sage Publications, 2013, pp. 165-181; p. 179.

²⁰⁵ Lieutenant H. Jackson, Indian Navy Commanding no 3 Indian Naval Brigade to C.D. Campbell, Senior Officer of the Indian Navy at Calcutta, Letter Number 14, 20 January 1859, Government of India, Marine Consultations, OIOC.

²⁰⁶ The United Service Gazette, 15 January 1859, Quoted in Rowbotham, *The Naval Brigades in the Indian Mutiny, 1857-58*: p. 45.

²⁰⁷ A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal To C. Beadon, Secretary to the Government of India, Letter Number 1365, 1 March 1859, Government of India Marine Consultations, OIOC.

²⁰⁸ Seton-Karr, *A Short Account of Events During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857*: p. 26.

²⁰⁹ For more details see Sarmistha De, *Marginal Europeans in Colonial India, 1860-1920*, Kolkata: Thema Publications, 2008.

3.7 CONCLUSION

The cumulative effect of rumour and panic that was manifested in Calcutta and its surrounding regions was followed by acts of open rebellion in the region east of the lower province of the Bengal presidency. A few observations can be made in this context. Firstly, as has been argued by Eric Stokes and stressed by C.A. Bayly, Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Tapti Roy, this chapter too argues that the nature and character of the rebellion depended and varied according to the specificity of the region. The absence of any formal attachment of the rebel sepoys with the land and rural population in the region, as was the case in Awadh, constricted the scope of the rebellion. As a consequence, although different regiments of the native army mutinied in the region, the objective of these rebel sepoys was to go back to their own places from where they were recruited. This is evident from the eventual arrival of the mutinied sepoys of the 73rd Native Infantry from Dhaka to Awadh. But the stark similarity of rebel action and from the various mutinous plots it appears that the region was interconnected with the north-central Gangetic heartland. Secondly, although support from the landed aristocracy or the civil population for the rebellion was limited, we have argued that the rebel sepoys did receive some covert support and sympathy from local groups and from within the neighbouring regions. The connections established between the sepoys and the Faraizi sects, the assistance provided by the Bhutan Subah and, in particular the local zamindar Hurrah Singh towards the mutinous sepoys, the covert assistance received from the rebel Manipuri princes and the local Kookies in the region, elucidate this point further. Furthermore, it was not only the mutinous sepoys who were a real cause of concern for the colonial administration. From the case study of Jessore, it appears that the retired

army-men who were later incorporated into the civil administration, had as much commonality of interest and were as much involved as the mutinous sepoys of the region. In spite of the network of intelligence and the emergency deployment of the European seamen in the region, the colonial government not only failed to check the panic and the subsequent outburst of the rebellion, but found it extremely difficult to keep track of rebel actions. Many a times, the colonial government was clueless regarding the activities and movement of the mutineers because of the contradictory reports and the unverified sources of information coming from different districts of the province and from the north-central Gangetic heartland. As a result even the colonial government failed to act rationally taking recourse to superstitious acts, which exacerbated the situation. Last but not the least, although the European seamen of the Naval Brigades played a vital role in suppressing and checking the rebellious outbursts to a certain extent, especially in Chittagong and more so in Dhaka, but the ways in which these seamen were recruited by the colonial government, did not help their cause in the long run.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM RELIANCE TO DISSIDENCE:

ASSAM AND THE NORTH-EAST FRONTIER

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous two chapters, which dealt with the regions in the lower province of Bengal, I have attempted to study and analyse the nature and character of the rebellion as it unfolded in a chronological and spatial sequence. While doing so, efforts were made to study the role of rumours in shaping the course of events, the actions of rebels and the response of the colonial state in dealing with the crises. In the present chapter I wish to analyse similar questions in the context of the North-East Frontier of British India. As stated earlier in the introduction, the rebellion of 1857 has so far mostly been studied in terms of the acts of violence that was unfolded in various parts of India. As a consequence, the history of the rebellion vis-à-vis Assam and the northeast region of India had been consigned to collective oblivion from the historiography of the rebellion. Although there has been no dearth of historical research on the north-east and Assam, the rebellion of 1857 only figures as a passing reference in contemporary scholarly writings.¹ The rebellion formed an

¹ In the recent years, apart from the article on the historiography of literature and sources concerning the rebellion in north-east by David R. Syiemlieh, there has been no initiative to have a fresh look on this subject. See David R Syiemlieh, "Historiography of Literature and Sources on the Uprising of 1857 in North East India," in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Rethinking 1857*, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2007.; The rebellion of 1857 vis-à-vis Assam has figured only as a partial reference point in Jayeeta Sharma's book which has otherwise dealt with issues of local and imperial knowledge, economic improvement and social progress, cultural and religious assertions,

important event in the history of the colonial rule and the later-day nationalist movement in Assam. This chapter sets the rebellion of 1857 in a historical context that analyses the background in which the intended rebellion in Assam took shape. It will be an interesting investigation in terms of the contrasting response from the actors that were involved. Assam and the North-East Frontier, unlike the lower provinces of the Bengal presidency discussed in the previous chapters, came under formal British control in 1826, only about three decades before the rebellion broke out in 1857. In this context the chapter briefly looks at the ways in which colonial rule was established in Assam, socio-political and other structural changes that were brought in by the colonial administration in this province, the response and resistance of the traditional ruling elites related to the changed structure of administration, eventually leading to the intended rebellion in 1857. The chapter seeks to explore the extent to which the events unfolding in the lower province of the Bengal Presidency and in the Gangetic heartland were interconnected with the development of the situation in Assam during the time of the rebellion. While doing so, it also looks at the reactions and responses of the actors involved belonging to both the side of the spectrum.

colonial exploitation, local resistances and nationalist ideologies. See Jayeeta Sharma, *Empire's Garden: Assam and the Making of India*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.; Similarly, in the recent book on Goalpara by Sanghamitra Misra, there is hardly any reference of the events concerning the rebellion of 1857 and its effect on the region. Saṅghamitrā Miśra, *Becoming a Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India*, Transition in Northeastern India, New Delhi; New York: Routledge, 2011.

4.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Assam was formally brought under the dominion of the British East India Company in 1826 after the expulsion of the Burmese and the signing of the treaty of Yandaboo with the King of Ava on the 24 March 1826.² The authorities of the East India Company, both in India as well as in England, were interested in the commercial possibilities with the North-East Frontier since 1780s.³ As early as in September 1785, on the representation made by the merchant adventurers, the Council in Calcutta had expressed the desire to extend the Company's salt-trade into the neighbouring kingdom of Assam.⁴ In fact, this period witnessed several officials of the East India Company struggling to gain exclusive rights over the sites of production and distribution of salt in this region.⁵

With the Burmese invasion in Assam and the North-East Frontier, situations began to change rapidly. By early 1817, the Burmese invaded the Upper Assam, crushed all the opposition and carried off in return a huge indemnity including an Ahom princess as a present to the harem of the Burmese monarch.⁶ In the absence of

² Walter Hamilton, *The East-India Gazetteer*, vol. 1, London: W. H. Allen and Company, 1828, p. 95.

³ Anil Chandra Banerjee, *The Eastern Frontier of British India, 1784-1826*, 4th ed., Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Company, 1986, pp. 10-12.

⁴ H. K. Barpujari, *Assam in the Days of the Company, 1826-1858: A Critical and Comprehensive History of Assam During the Rule of the East-India Company from 1826-1858, Based on Original Assamese and English Sources, Both Published and Unpublished*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed., Gauhati, Assam: Spectrum Publications: Sole distributors, United Publishers, 1980, p. 6.

⁵ Miśra, *Becoming a Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India*: p. 75.

⁶ Upper and Lower Assam: The province of Assam is usually divided into two broad categories based on the flow of the river Brahmaputra. The logic behind this categorization is that the river flows from high land towards the low land. Since Brahmaputra flows from the eastern part of Assam toward the western side, the eastern parts of Assam, being high lands are known as Upper Assam and western parts are known as Lower Assam.

a strong and organised opposition and the initial policy of non-intervention of the East India Company, the Burmese dictated the terms by becoming the kingmakers of these otherwise independent princely states of India. The East India Company authorities in Calcutta ignored these initial threats and indirectly encouraged the Ahom Princes to build up arms, ammunitions and men in order to be ready for the impending attack from the Burmese. However, the continuous aggressive acts and war-like preparations from the Burmese in and around Assam and Cachar followed by the invasion of the island of Shahpuri in 1823, forced the British authorities to reconsider their policy of non-intervention.⁷ As Yasmin Saikia pointed out, the British became fearful that the Burmese might overrun the region and subsequently knock on their door in Bengal.⁸ Eventually, when the Burmese tried to invade the region in the early months of 1824, Lord Amherst, the Governor General of India at the time, had no other options but to declare the war against them. In February 1826 the King of Ava formally renounced his claim upon Assam and the neighbouring states of Manipur and Jaintia. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, one of the eminent personalities of the time later recalled, ‘Our countrymen hailed the day on which the British supremacy was proclaimed... lawless tyranny and barbarous inhuman policy of the Burmese depopulated the country and destroyed more than half of the population.’⁹

⁷ Shahpuri Island is situated in the southernmost part of the Chittagong district in present-day Bangladesh.

⁸ Sayeeda Yasmin Saikia, *Fragmented Memories: Struggling to Be Tai-Ahom in India*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 8.

⁹ A. Dhekial Phukan, “Observation on the Administration of the Province of Assam” in Andrew John Moffatt Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, Gauhati, 1854, p. 93.

With the defeat of the Burmese, the British paramountcy was established in the whole of the North-East Frontier of India. David Scott, the Agent to the Governor General in the North-East Frontier, on 15 April 1826, almost immediately guaranteed the sovereignty of Cachar, Manipur and Jaintia with their respective rulers, and proposed to the Government of Bengal the restoration of the former Ahom monarchy in Upper Assam under the protection of the East India Company.¹⁰ Not everyone amongst the Company officials was convinced by Scott's proposals. Authorities back in Calcutta were against the idea of restoring the Ahom princes to the Upper Assam mainly on the pretext that none of the princes helped the cause of the British during the Burmese war.¹¹ After some deliberation, Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General of India of the time, finally decided to restore the Ahom Princes to Upper Assam. But again, the question that the British administration had to face was whom to install as the Raja. Eventually on 2 March 1833 Purandar Singha was declared the ruler of Assam, under the condition, amongst others, that he would pay an annual tribute of 50,000 rupees to the East India Company.¹² But more importantly, he was given this condition that if, in any way, he was found 'unsuitable' for the job, the East India Company reserved the right to either transfer the territory to another ruler, or, might take it within its own domain at any point of time. Thus, in other words, although Purandar Singha was given the supreme right over the throne, but in all practical purposes it was the East India Company's government who had the final say and control. In order to prevent any further complications, the government decided to remove Chandra Kanta Singha, the other claimant to the throne to

¹⁰ Secret and Political Consultations, 14 July 1827, Number: 2, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

¹¹ Secret and Political Consultations, 7 March 1828, Number 4, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

¹² Saikia, *Fragmented Memories*: p. 9.

Kaliabar in Central Assam where he was given a pension of five hundred rupees but was kept under strict surveillance.¹³

It is important to note here that after the defeat of the Burmese, the British introduced certain far-reaching changes in the region, the most significant being in the system of agrarian relations. Under the Ahom rule the payment of revenue in the form of cash or produce was of a limited extent and the foundations of its fiscal system was an insistence on labour services of the entire community. For this purpose the entire free population (*paiks*) was divided into groups called *khels*, each *khel* being further divided into smaller units (*gots*), composed of three or four *paiks*.¹⁴ This traditional set-up in the land relation in Assam was fundamentally altered with the establishment of the colonial rule in the region. The introduction of a distinct professional army and an elaborate administrative network of bureaucracy by the colonial administration made the labour services of the *paiks* redundant, since the British wanted such labour services transformed into a cash tribute.¹⁵ Instead, the *paiks* were converted from serfs to free tenants on payment of three rupees a year.¹⁶ This measure, as Gareth Price has argued, coupled with the failure to pay any compensation to the Ahom ruling class, curtailed the latter's economic power.¹⁷ In addition, the *khel* system, as a unit of assessment, was unworkable to the British.

¹³ Judicial Proceedings Number 341(a), 12 May 1834, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁴ 'Pyke', or 'paik', referred to an enrolled adult male subject of the Ahom King having to render specific duties to the state. 'Khel' is an organisation of *paiks* having to perform specific services to the Ahom government.

¹⁵ Benoy Bhushan Chaudhuri, "The Land and the People: Agrarian Relations in Eastern India," in Dharma Kumar (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India Volume 2, C.1757-C.1970*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983: p. 92.

¹⁶ Gareth Price, "The Assam Movement and the Construction of Assamese Identity", PhD Thesis, University of Bristol, 1997, p. 144.

¹⁷ Price, "The Assam Movement": p. 144.

Furthermore, the Bengal model of permanent settlement introduced by Cornwallis in 1793 was not followed in Assam, owing to a growing feeling that the permanent fixation of the land revenue demand would be a sheer folly in view of the increasing financial needs of the Company. As a result, the revenue demand in Assam was increased from time to time since the British took control of the region.¹⁸ As Benoy Bhushan Chaudhuri had pointed out, the old Assamese aristocracy, both lay and spiritual, to which the Ahom king trusted the defense of the realm and a large part of the civil administration, became redundant under the new system.¹⁹ The British denied this aristocracy any share in the administration, and gradually confiscated such estates. Even where the aristocrats could retain some, the abolition of the *khel* system and slavery deprived them of the necessary labour force required for their cultivation.²⁰ Their position only worsened when they, not being able to reconcile to the changes, sought to retrieve their lost power by force.

Quite clearly what the British authorities desired of the dispossessed nobility was a radical readjustment in their mental outlook. It fell too heavily on a class of people, long accustomed to a life of ease, to change their habits so abruptly and to take up other avocations, particularly those demanding manual labour. The far reaching changes that had taken place since the British occupation naturally brought irritation and suffering in every home that had solely depended on the services of the others. The utter destitution to which some of the higher families were reduced to could be read in the piteous representations that were made frequently whenever an

¹⁸ Assam Revenue Commissioner's Office, *Report on the Revenue Administration of the Province of Assam*: Calcutta, 1854.

¹⁹ Chaudhuri, "The Land and the People: Agrarian Relations in Eastern India," p. 93.

²⁰ Chaudhuri, "The Land and the People: Agrarian Relations in Eastern India," p. 93.

opportunity presented itself. As the years rolled on their lot became more and more unbearable, eventually realising that their salvation lay in the restoration of the ancient regime, and only through such an event, could they hope to retrieve their fortune.

Thus, within a few years after the British took control of the region, there were already signs of rebellion against the colonial government from various groups of the Ahom nobilities. As early as in 1828, Gomdhar Singha, a descendent of the great Ahom King Suhummong (1497-1539) claimed his position in the region. His claim was to a large extent strengthened by the dispossessed Ahom nobility who took this as an opportunity to regain their lost privileges.²¹ But when his claim to be the Rajah was denied, Gomdhar had no other option but to go for an open rebellion against the colonial government.²² Although Gomdhar and his associates met with some initial success in troubling the colonial government, but their hopes were soon belied when Captain Neufville, along with Lieutenant Rutherford, intercepted the movements of the rebels.²³ After a feeble resistance Gomdhar and his fellow men surrendered and was later convicted and tried in Jorhat.²⁴ A similar attempt was made by the nobles almost immediately in 1829 to overthrow the British rule from the region, this time under another Ahom prince named Gadadhar, then Governor of the Burmese province of Menda-Tim Myoo. Gadadhar and his fellows had planned for an armed resistance with the help of the Burmese emperor by taking him into confidence. In

²¹ Foreign Department Secret Consultations Number: 11-4, 12 March 1830, Government of Bengal, NAI.

²² Gomdhar to Neufville, 23 October 1828, Foreign Department Secret Consultations Number: 11-4, 12 March 1830, NAI.

²³ Foreign Department Political Consultations Number 57, 10 June 1831, OIOC.

²⁴ Foreign Department Secret Consultations Number: 12, 12 March 1830, NAI.

addition to this, Gadadhar in an attempt to win over the native sepoys to his side, tried to get in touch with one Zalim Singh, the Subadar of the Assam Light Infantry at Sadiya.²⁵ However the plan failed when Zalim Singh, who was the loyal servant of the British government, arrested Gadadhar and sent him to Guwahati for trial.

The initial attempts of rebellion by the Ahom nobilities in order to overthrow the British control from the region were not that successful. Nonetheless there seems to be little doubt of the fact that the people were opposed to the colonial control of the region right from the very inception. Their failure was chiefly due to the fact that these attempted rebellions were mainly confined to the members of the Ahom nobility and the other disgruntled sections of the population who were deprived of the benefits of the British rule. Also, as Ajit Kumar Dutta has pointed out, there was a severe lack of unity amongst these factions and the absence of a strong and efficient leader.²⁶ At a time when they were expected to rise to the occasion they simply could not rise above their own interests and personal rivalries. Another important factor behind the lack of popular mass support for these early rebellions was the fact that in almost every instance the nobilities were rallying behind a new prince, ignoring Chandrakanta Singha and Purandar Singha who were the actual legal claimants of the Ahom throne. The hopes of these hard-pressed nobilities initially rested on the members of the royal family who were still acknowledged by many as the leaders of the people. It was the sole responsibility of Purandar Singha to represent the grievances of his nobilities to the British government. Purandar Singha endeavoured to impress the authorities in Calcutta that there was a growing

²⁵ Foreign Department Secret Consultations Numbers: 4-6, 25 June 1830, NAI.

²⁶ Ajit Kumar Dutta, *Maniram Dewan and the Contemporary Assamese Society*, Jorhat: Anupoma Dutta Distributors, Bidya Mandir, 1990, pp. 60-61.

discontent amongst the higher classes and the nobilities, and that the vast majority of the subjects still longed for his restoration.²⁷ But it was all in vain.

At around the time when the nobilities and the aristocracies as well as the people of the region were desperately seeking someone who could bring an end to all their suffering, Maniram Barua, hitherto one of the most trusted and loyal officials of the British government, came up with the task of relieving them. A brief discussion about Maniram is necessary to understand the broader context of his involvement in the intended rebellion of 1857.

4.3 MANIRAM DIWAN: A COLLABORATOR TURNED REBEL

Maniram Barbhandar Barua, more popularly known as Maniram Diwan, belonged to a distinguished Assamese family with a long record of service to the Ahom monarchy.²⁸ From his early years, Maniram displayed sharp intellect and rapidly excelled in statistical figures, comparative charts and tables.²⁹ After taking the formal control of the region, for the British the situation now demanded an urgent mapping and settlement as the newly acquired region was relatively unknown to them. This provided Maniram an excellent opportunity to ingratiate his way into the new political establishment. Maniram was initially so grateful to the efforts of the British that he prayed to God to grant the British a million-year rule in Assam as a

²⁷ A.S., File Number 299; See the memorial by Babu Gopinath Mukherjee, Attorney to the Raja, July 24, 1849, also April 27, 1841, Government of Bengal, NAI.

²⁸ For further details, see: Benudhar Sharma, *Maniram Dewan*, Calcutta: Publication House, 1950.

²⁹ Bijay Bhushan Hazarika, *Political Life in Assam During the Nineteenth Century*, New Delhi: Gyan Pub. House, 2006.

reward for rescuing the people from the 'sea of Burmese trouble'.³⁰ In fact, for his help and assistance towards the British, Maniram was rewarded with an important post in the revenue department in 1828, apart from his de-facto position as the chief native advisor to the colonial administration in Assam. Thus, in many different ways, it was a symbiotic relationship between Maniram and the colonial administration.

Maniram's honeymoon period with the British was not destined to last for long. After the resumption of the Ahom monarchy in 1838, the government took away from him most of the benefits he had enjoyed. Disillusioned to a large extent, he decided to take up the post of Diwan in the Assam Tea Company instead. Maniram's knowledge and local networks greatly helped the tea enterprise to establish itself firmly in the province. As Jayeeta Sharma reminds us, he helped more regular supplies of scarce rice through his establishment of weekly *haats* (local markets) near the tea gardens where villagers brought goods to sell.³¹ One of the directors of the Assam Tea Company, William Princep, on a visit from Calcutta, was delighted with Maniram's endeavours: 'I find the Native Department of the office in the most beneficial state under the excellent direction of Muneeram, whose intelligence and activity is of the greatest value to our Establishment.'³² Although successful in the initial few years as the Diwan, he had a bitter confrontation with one of the junior assistants of the Assam Tea Company, and finally resigned from the post in 1845.³³ Disappointed and disheartened with the colonial policies in the

³⁰ Dutta, *Maniram Dewan and the Contemporary Assamese Society*: p. 36.

³¹ Sharma, *Empire's Garden*: p. 45.

³² *Assam Company Report of the Local Directors Made to the Shareholders at a General Meeting, Held at Calcutta August 11th, 1841*, Calcutta: Bishop's College Press, 1841.

³³ According to Sharma, however, there seems to be no clear evidence as to the reason why Maniram was dismissed from the post of Diwan. According to Assamese folklore, Maniram retaliated when

region, Maniram henceforth associated and started projecting himself as the spokesperson for the restoration of the Ahom monarchy and the rights and privileges of the Ahom nobilities.³⁴ This would lead him to visit Calcutta quite frequently where he petitioned the British authorities in favour of the restoration of the Ahom monarchy.

The ambitions of Maniram are best reflected in one of the petitions that he presented to Sir Andrew John Moffat Mills, the Judge of the Sadar Diwani Adalat, who was deputed by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in 1853 to conduct an enquiry into the state of the local administration in the province.³⁵ In this petition, Maniram presented a balance sheet of the rule of the East India Company in Assam for the last three decades, highlighting a long list of grievances amongst the people of the region. Maniram praised the initial intervention of the British in the region whereby they assumed the direct administration of the lower part of the province while the upper province was set aside for the Ahom throne. However the trouble began when the government started interfering with the traditional order and system

he was slapped by one of the officials of the Assam Company and was thus dismissed. Another tale has it that Maniram's establishment of his own tea-estates offended the Assam Company. See Sharma, *Empire's Garden*: pp. 45-46.

³⁴ Maniram's disillusionment towards the colonial rule was further exasperated when the land he had acquired for the two tea-gardens at Cinnamora and Safrai was not granted special revenue concessions under the Waste Land Grant Rules of 1838. On the other hand his plantation land was assessed as ordinary rice-land, for which Maniram had to pay very high rates of land revenue. See: Tilottoma Misra, "Assam: A Colonial Hinterland", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15, no. 2, 1980, pp. 1357-1364: 1358.

³⁵ Petition of Maniram Diwan on account of Ghanakanta Singha Yuvraj and others to A.J.M. Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam Calcutta*, 1854, pp. 603-604.

of authority.³⁶ Interestingly the memorial also pointed out the changed relationship of the government with the hill tribes of the region. During the days of the Ahom rule all the tribes used to enjoy certain royal favours. But the British government abolished all these favours. ‘By the introduction into the Province of new customs, numerous courts, an unjust system of taxation, an objectionable treatment of the Hill Tribes, the consequence of which has been a constant warfare with them, involving a mutual loss of life and money’ on both the sides.³⁷ They feared that the British were about to take absolute control of the region and their initial proclamations were only a camouflage to conceal their real intentions. Also, many of the Ahom nobles could not be accommodated under the pension scheme and became disaffected elements. In light of this, he strongly urged for the restoration of the Ahom princes – Ghanakanta Singha or Kandarpeswar Singha – that might reintroduce the customs and institutions of the old days. It is important to note in this context, as Barpujari had argued, that Maniram perhaps did not have any preference as to which of the Ahom prince he was speaking in favour of. All he wanted was the restoration of ancient regime in the province.³⁸

Maniram had thus taken a decisive step forward as far as his relationship with the British was concerned, though an open defiance towards the British was yet to come. However, the violent terms in which he had denounced the British government did not serve his cause and worsened the already embittered relations

³⁶ Petition of Maniram Diwan in Suresh K. Sharma, ed. *Documents on North-East India: Assam*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2006, p. 96.

³⁷ Sharma, ed. *Documents on North-East India*: p. 98.

³⁸ Major Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam, in one of remarks criticised the motives of Maniram: ‘I do not believe that Maniram had regard for the young Raja in his intrigues, which I conceived originated in bitter enmity to the Government.’ A.S., Letter issued to the Government, Vol. XXII, 1858, 23 September 1857, Number 23.

with the local authorities. A. J. Moffatt Mills, the Judge of the Sadar Diwani Adawlat (Chief Civil Court), was deputed by the Governor-General in Council to make a close enquiry regarding the local state of administration in the province.³⁹ This detailed and exhaustive report, commonly known as the *Mills's Report on Assam*, forms one of the principal source materials of the administrative history of the region in the days of the Company. In this report Mills himself made a searching criticism on different aspects of the government's policies and spared no one in this regard. But, where he differed fundamentally from Maniram was that while the former came up with some constructive suggestions for the general improvement of the administration and help consolidate the position of the British Empire in the region, the latter was convinced that the only way to change the existing situation was to return to the older order. Mills believed that Maniram was by nature 'an intriguing person', and was responsible for creating discontent and disturbing the general tranquillity of the region.⁴⁰ He strongly suggested the government not to entertain the points raised by Maniram in his petition. Disappointed Maniram was not about to give up his hope and made several attempts to represent his case to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in Calcutta. But despite his trying efforts, he could not persuade the government.

4.4 THE REBELLION OF 1857 AND MANIRAM DIWAN

It was at this time when the outbreak of the rebellion of 1857 provided the desperate Maniram with a new opportunity. While he frequently visited Calcutta to persuade

³⁹ Foreign Department Political Consultations Number 65, 16 May 1853, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

⁴⁰ Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*: p. 626.

the colonial government, he heard the reports of the outbreak of mutiny in different parts of north and central India. Fresh reports were pouring in every day of the circulation of some strange and apparently meaningless items like chapatis across the villages and districts of northern India.⁴¹ Like the modern day chain letters, these chapatis were to be multiplied and circulated amongst friends by the recipient.⁴² The government, though very much aware of this circulation, had no idea what these actually signified. As Wagner has noted, the colonial administration regarded with deep suspicion, bordering on paranoia, any type of communication amongst Indians which they could not understand.⁴³ The administration was particularly confused and unnerved by the speed with which these chapatis were being circulated.⁴⁴ By the time the authorities were informed of its transmission within a district, it had already moved on – an understandably disturbing sign of the efficiency of the indigenous modes of communication that lay outside colonial control. Calcutta, the capital of the

⁴¹ ‘*Chapati*’ is an unleavened cake of bread (generally of coarse wheat meal), patted with the hand and baked on a griddle; the usual form of bread and staple food of north India.

⁴² In the early months of 1857, the district officials in northern and central India began to receive reports about an unusual event taking place in the countryside. The British were astonished to learn that ‘dirty little cakes of the coarsest flour, about the size and thickness of a biscuit’, were being passed on from one village to the next in the North-Western Provinces and in central India. The mysterious nature of this transmission was the subject of a great deal of conjecture among members of the British community in India. The subject has been dealt by historians over the period and there seems to be no consensus regarding the circulation. While the contemporary colonial historians asserted that it was part of a more general political conspiracy, later day scholars however have questioned that assertion. To Ranajit Guha the circulation was a subject of ‘historic miscognition’. For further details on the debates on chapati circulation see Troy Downs, “Host of Midian: The Chapati Circulation and the Indian Revolt of 1857-58,” *Studies in History*, 16, no. 1, 2000: 75-107; Kim A. Wagner, “‘Treading Upon Fires’: The ‘Mutiny’-Motif and Colonial Anxieties in British India”, *Past and Present*, 218, no. 1, 2013: 159-197.

⁴³ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: p. 63

⁴⁴ Kim A. Wagner, “‘Treading Upon Fires’: The ‘Mutiny’-Motif and Colonial Anxieties in British India”, *Past and Present*, 218, no. 1, 2013: 159-197.

British empire of the time, was swayed with reports of various kinds: how the British arsenal in different parts of north and central India had fallen in to Indian hands, how the prisoners kept confined in various prisons had been set at liberty, how the various lines of communications had been shattered in various places. As we have already seen in the previous chapters, these reports, verified and unverified, had already created an atmosphere of panic and terror among the British administration in and around the city of Calcutta. The proclamations in the name of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last of the Mughal Emperor, were being circulated and read in the dark of night. These proclamations contained some common grievances of the people of India which Maniram found were similar to his own thoughts in his petitions. The way forward was also the very same path that he had previously chalked out. The only difference being that, while Maniram was trying to persuade the government through prayers, pleas and petitions, the rebels of 1857 in the heartland of India had taken recourse to armed resistance. But these sensational reports and proclamations were adequate to move the Diwan away from the constitutional procedure which he had so far followed.

There were already adequate incendiary materials in the North-East Frontier which Maniram realised could easily be united with that of the general uprising of 1857. The geographical location of the region, the attitude of the nobility, the empty assurances of the colonial officials, the successive humiliation suffered at the hands of the British by both the rulers and the ruled of the region and the growing unpopularity of the British administration amongst the border tribes of the region – all these factors were already on his mind. But what made the Diwan change his plan of action was the deployment of the native sepoy in the region. It might be

recollected that since the withdrawal of the Regular Troops in 1828, the defence of the North-East Frontier was entrusted to the regiment that was originally formed for the service in the province of Cuttack.⁴⁵ This became the Assam Light Infantry Battalion whose headquarter was in Guwahati. In addition, to guard the extreme frontiers, Captain Hannay raised another battalion of the Irregular army composed of recruits mostly from the Assamese, Singphoes and some other tribes.⁴⁶ But by 1844, when the government realised that most of the tribes had withdrawn from the corps, there were some redistribution of the sepoys and officers and the corps were upgraded and converted into the Second Assam Light Infantry battalion. At around the time of the uprising of 1857, the head quarters of the First Assam Light Infantry was under the command of Major Hannay and was based in Dibrugarh, while the Second Assam Light Infantry was based in Guwahati under the command of Major Richardson. This apart, detachments were also posted at other strategic outposts of the frontier.⁴⁷ Although the harrowing tales of massacres of the British men and women by the native sepoys were, by then, already pouring in from various sources – wanderer and fakirs, newspapers, reports, personal letters and rumours – the sepoys of the Assam Light Infantry remained calm and remained loyal to the British

⁴⁵ L. W. Shakespear, *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burmah and North-Eastern Frontier*, London: Macmillan, 1914, p. 65.

⁴⁶ Singphoes are a virile border tribe that inhabited the eastern most part of Assam through which lay the passage to Burma. They occupied the tract of the country called Namrup extending eastward from the Matak border to the head of the Dihing River. See Hazarika, *Political Life in Assam During the Nineteenth Century*: p. 214.

⁴⁷ Letter sent from Colonel Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General and commanding troops in Assam, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 29 May 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 784, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

government in the initial period.⁴⁸ One of the probable reasons was the fact that the number of Hindustani sepoy in these regiments was not so great and the social composition of the sepoy in this region was heterogeneous in nature.⁴⁹ The majority of the sepoy recruited in the army came from different communities like Nepalis, Manipuris, Rabhas, Jarrowas, Doaneahs and other tribes. That the prevailing situation in the barracks was peaceful is evident from the statement of Major Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam who flattered himself to report to the authorities back in Calcutta that despite the pressing invitations from the rebels, both the regiments stationed at Debrugarh and Gauhati had not only expressed their loyalty to the government but even some of them have also volunteered their services for joining in actions against the rebels.⁵⁰

4.5 INTENSIFICATION OF THE UPRISING IN THE GANGETIC HEARTLAND AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS IN THE REGION

The situation in Assam began to change towards the close of July 1857 when the news of the mutiny of the Danapur Regiment and especially the defection of Kunwar

⁴⁸ Letter from Lieutenant Colonel S.F. Hannay, commanding the 1st Assam Light Infantry to Colonel Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General and commanding troops in Assam, dated 10 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number: 813, Letter Number: 91, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁴⁹ Letter from Lieutenant Colonel S.F. Hannay, commanding the 1st Assam Light Infantry to Colonel Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General and commanding troops in Assam, dated 10 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number: 813, Letter Number: 91, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁵⁰ Letter from Colonel Jenkins to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 25 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings 10 August 1857, Letter Number 817, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

Singh of Jagdishpur in Bihar began to reach the North-East Frontier.⁵¹ There was a sizeable number of native sepoys in the Assam Light Infantry who were recruited from the district of Arrah in Bihar, near to where Kunwar Singh lived.⁵² These sepoys were now persuaded to believe the rumour that the British rule that was to last for hundred years was actually coming to an end and that the Mughal Emperor in Delhi had already reinstated himself on the throne and a large part of the country was already in the hands of the native sepoys.⁵³ The diary of George Carter, a British soldier stationed at Debrugarh at the time, provides an important source for this period. Carter, a sergeant in the 2nd Bengal Fusiliers in Ambala, was transferred in 1856 to the 1st Assam Light Infantry. In the beginning of June 1857, Carter learnt through the *Calcutta Phoenix Extraordinary* of the outbreak of the mutiny in the heartland of India. He wrote,

The rebellion as far as I can glean from natives has been foreseen for some years by them in an indiscreet manner: there is a prophecy among them which has been talked of till they believed it would be a true one: namely, that after the completion of a hundred years from the time the British took Bengal (i.e., the battle of Plassey on 23rd June 1757) the British in India will expire.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Letters from The Agent to the Governor General, NE Frontier to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Proceeding 29 August 1857, Number: 482, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁵² Letters from The Agent to the Governor General, NE Frontier to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Proceeding 29 August 1857, Number: 482, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁵³ Letter from Lieutenant Colonel S.F. Hannay, Commanding the 1st Assam Light Infantry to Colonel Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General and Commanding troops in Assam, dated 22 July 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number: 530, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

⁵⁴ Diary of Sergeant Major George Carter, Mss Eur E262, OIOC.

Colonel Hannay, the commander officer of the 1st Assam Light Infantry, in the month of July reported excitement prevailing in the cantonment and urged for precautionary measures to be taken immediately. He also informed Carter in August that the agents from northern India were in Gauhati and was ‘trying to arrange a rising amongst our Sepoys in connection with the Assam Rajah.’⁵⁵ What made the situation even more critical for the British was the dearth of adequate European soldiers in the province compared to the vast number of native sepoys. Although there were a few platoons of European soldiers miles away, they could not be discharged from their duties at the time and moved in to the North-East Frontier.⁵⁶

Enthused by all these factors and developments discussed above, Maniram started sending letters through messengers in the guise of *fakirs*. The letters were more often written in heavily coded language that echoed the ‘surging passions of Hindustan’ to Kandarpeswar Singha, the grandson of Purandar Singha and the young Rajah of Assam. These correspondences addressed to the King and the nobles soon reached a wider audience. These letters and private correspondences containing detailed instructions were also addressed to the leading ranks and nobilities of Assam like the Gosain of Kamalabari, Madhuras Koch, Mayaram Barbara, Chitrasen Barbara, Ganesh Chandra Barua, Marangi Khowa Gohain, Sheikh Bahadur Gaonbura and most notably, Piyali *alias* Mahesh Chandra Barua.⁵⁷ In the absence of the Diwan,

⁵⁵ Hussain. I., “A Mid-Nineteenth Century View of Assam: The Little Known Diary of Sergeant Major George Carter”, Proceedings of the North East India History Association, Tenth Session (Shillong 1989) p. 459.

⁵⁶ Letter from Colonel Jenkins to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 9 July 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 954, 10 August 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁵⁷ Letters from Jenkins, the Agent to the Governor General, NE Frontier to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated 29 August 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number 268, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

Piyali Barua acted as the Chief Counsel to the young King Kardarpeswar Singha. Piyali had a rare combination of being a politician with musical talent. But, more importantly, he was a man of rare organising capacity. He had his hold not only over the people but also over the sepoys of the 2nd Assam Light Infantry. In fact all these correspondences and secret deliberations from the Diwan mainly veered around Piyali Barua who was the rallying point behind the network. At a time when the sepoys in the region were becoming restless with the recent developments across the country, Piyali Barua along with Nirmal Hazari took the opportunity and regularly visited the several military detachments in Golaghat, in the district of Sibsagar, and also at Debrugarh and Saikhowa, in an attempt to raise them against the British government. Supposedly sent by the young prince Kandarpeswar Singha, these two agents tried to lure the native sepoys with tempting bait: ‘The Sahibs must be killed and the rajah should be placed on the throne; the latter would have to furnish with ‘rasud’ [provisions], the ball and powder’ while the Rajah in turn ‘would double the pay of the sepoys and give the native officers’ pay like the ‘Jongie paltan’ [i.e. a platoon of Europeans] if all the sepoys would join and get him the country.’⁵⁸

These voices of dissent were soon heard echoing from others as well. The reports of the Calcutta Directors of the Assam Tea Company noted that in the town of Nazira, in the Sibsagar district of Assam, under the leadership of one tea garden contractor named Madhuran Koch, labourers refused to carry out their tasks any further on the plea that they would not get their pay since all the Europeans will soon

⁵⁸ Judicial Proceedings 14 January 1858, Number: 155, Government of Bengal, WBSA; Letters from Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 29 August 1857, Judicial Proceedings 17 September 1857, Letter Number: 482, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

be cut up.⁵⁹ This point has also been highlighted by Amalendu Guha in his study *Planter Raj to Swaraj*.⁶⁰ The popular character of the rebellion in Assam could be discerned from the observations made by the Board of Directors of the Assam Tea Company in Calcutta at the time which observed on 2 March 1858 that while the private servants were still obedient and loyal in maintaining order, the native inhabitants of the region who served as independent contractors for cultivating the land were suspected to be the troubled lot.⁶¹ Many of these native contractors, far from being cooperative in suppressing the rebellion, were in fact sympathetic with the young prince Kandarpeswar and the rebel sepoys. During this period, these dissenters held off from the performance of their contracts on the plea that they were not to be paid, believing that the Europeans ‘were to be cut up’. The Chairman of the Assam Tea Company, D.C. Mackey, further reported about a series of meetings that Madhuram Koch had with the tea-plantation workers of the region ‘in the secret of the night’ during the month of June and July 1857.⁶² Although the details of the meetings are nowhere to be found, but from the statement of one of the workers named Ramlal Bahadur, later recorded by Mackey, it was known that Madhuram had persuaded the workers to wait for the right opportunity, and once ‘the fitting moment

⁵⁹ “Report of the Calcutta Directors of the Assam Tea Company 1856-58,” *Selections of Records of the Government of Bengal*, Volume XXXVII, Papers relating to the Tea Cultivation in Assam, Calcutta 1861.

⁶⁰ Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, 3rd ed., New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2006.

⁶¹ Letter sent from the Chairman of the Assam tea Company to the Agent to the Governor-General in North East Frontier, Judicial Proceedings Number 958, 23 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁶² Forwarded letter from the Chairman of the Assam Tea Company to the Secretary to the Government of India, Judicial Proceedings Number 962-63, 23 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

arrives' they should all rise up in arms, join their fellow comrades and help reinstate the King of Assam.⁶³ According to the statement of Ramlal Bahadur, Madhuras had promised the workers that once they have succeeded 'in freeing the country from the *Firingis* the King of Assam shall be rewarding them in the most wonderful manner'.⁶⁴ Under the circumstances the Board of Directors therefore hardly had any confidence about the fidelity of these men: 'Had an outbreak occurred, there can be little doubt that they would have sided with the rebels'.⁶⁵ The involvement of the Tea plantation workers during the rebellion of 1857 in Assam is an interesting aspect that deserves further investigation. Unfortunately the paucity of archival records has constricted us from doing so. But considering the traditional feudal setup of the Assamese society, it is not highly unlikely that the plantation labourers, many of whom were local recruits and had their loyalty towards their King, would probably have supported the cause of the rebellion in Assam.

In addition to the labourers of the Plantation Company, Dutiram Barua of the House of Namtial Kakati, who was then serving as the 'Seristadar', a keeper of records, at Sibsagar, resigned from his post and joined the 'rebel cause'.⁶⁶ Shaikh Bhikan, the Subadar in command of the Hindustani sepoys at Dibrugarh, and other

⁶³ "Statement of Ramlal Bahadoor", Forwarded letter from the Chairman of the Assam Tea Company to the Secretary to the Government of India, Judicial Proceedings Number 962-63, 23 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁶⁴ "Statement of Ramlal Bahadoor", Forwarded letter from the Chairman of the Assam Tea Company to the Secretary to the Government of India, Judicial Proceedings Number 962-63, 23 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁶⁵ Forwarded letter from the Chairman of the Assam Tea Company, Letter sent from the Agent to the Northeast Frontier to the Secretary to the Government of India (Home), Judicial Proceedings Number: 439, 16 March 1858, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁶⁶ Letter sent from Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 17 August 1857, Home Public Proceeding Number: 84, Government of Bengal, NAI.

leaders of the sepoys at Dibrugarh and Saikhowa, inspired by the development of the situation, swore upon their knightly words to help the cause of the King by all means; while Marangikhowa Gohain, the step-grandson of the King Purandar Singha who was in charge of the estate of Marangi, started recruiting men from his estate for the cause.

The guiding spirit behind this whole plan was Maniram Diwan, then residing in Calcutta, who prompted the young prince Kandarpeswar, and with the help of his friends most notably a Bengali ‘muktear’ (an agent or a spokesman) Madhu Mallik, prepared the grounds for the insurrection.⁶⁷ These confidential deliberations were to an extent successful in evoking a ready response from the Chief and nobles of Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Nowgong, Gauhati and other places which were at a distance from Jorhat. Captain Holroyd, the Principal Assistant of Sibsagar at the time, later reported in details the proceedings of the rebels. According to Holroyd’s report from around the time of the commencement of the rebellion, Madhu Mallik used to come to the Rajah and read to him and others in the court the news of the rebellion from the newspaper *Samachar Darpan*.⁶⁸ In the month of May 1857, a letter came from Maniram Diwan in Calcutta to the Rajah that was later intercepted by colonial administration. It was a long letter about tea and indigo and other miscellaneous matters but inside of this was a smaller letter. In that letter Maniram Diwan wrote:

⁶⁷ Letter from Holroyd to A.R. Young dated 28 June 1857, Judicial Proceedings 29 July 1858, Letter Number 115, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁶⁸ Judicial Proceedings 24 June 1857, Letter Number: 211, Enclosure Number 149, 14 December 1857, WBSA; Judicial Proceedings 29 July 1858, Letter Number: 115, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

...in Hindoostan [Northern India] the Badshah had taken all the country... that but a little distance remained for his reaching Calcutta. The Sahebs in Calcutta were in great alarm and that in a few days' time Calcutta would be destroyed. The Rajah should consider and arrange matters for ascending on the Ghuddee [throne] and that he would reach Assam shortly with the sepoy [who were] ready to rise to join with them.⁶⁹

Holroyd added that Madhu Mallik insisted the Rajah to see to this matter at once but 'that it was not good to keep this letter and should be torn up at once.'⁷⁰ Towards the end of July 1857, Piyali Barua was deputed to Golaghat with letters from the Saring Rajah (Kandarpeswar Singha) in order to arrange matters with the native officers and sepoy on that command. The point to be noted in this context is that similar to the Gangetic heartland where the rebels had carried the formal ratification of the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, Maniram realised that however strong his influence over the ruling elites of Assam was, in order to receive the support of the people it was essential to have the formal sanction of the King. Piyali Barua, while in Golaghat, visited influential people in the vicinity and arranged that the intended rising should occur about the time of the Durga Pujah in the month of October, when Maniram had stated to arrive.⁷¹ In the meantime during the months of July and August Piyali Barua and Madhu Mallik, along with a few others like Hensou Barua and Kumla Saring Barua, took an active part in holding frequent meetings at Jorhat,

⁶⁹ Judicial Proceedings 24 June 1857, Letter Number: 211, Enclosure Number 149, 14 December 1857, WBSA; Judicial Proceedings 29 July 1858, Letter Number: 115, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁷⁰ Letter sent from Holroyd to the Agent to the Governor General North-East Frontier dated 28 May 1857, Home Public Proceedings Number 498, 10 June 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

⁷¹ Judicial Proceedings Number 321, Letter Number 34, 29 July 1858, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

in the presence of the Saring Rajah.⁷² These meetings were attended by many others including Bahadoor Gaon Boora and Shaikh Farmud, who exerted themselves to induce others to unite in aid of the Rajah's designs. In addition, others were persuaded to collect *russuds* for the troops by offering them gold and valuable metals.⁷³

The tide seemed rapidly to be turning against the authorities and both the colonial administration as well as the European population in the region was alarmed with the prospect of an impending rebellion. Colonel F. Jenkins, the Agent to the Governor General of the North-East Frontier, had already expressed his concern regarding the restless behaviour of the sepoys in the province, many of whom were recruited from the region of Arrah, and were loyal to their rebel leader Kunwar Singh.⁷⁴ Jenkins also mentioned the prior intimation from Captain Holroyd, the Principal Assistant of Sibsagar district, who had reported to him that 'two or three native officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, of the 1st Light Assam Infantry on duty with a Detachment at Golaghaut proceeding on leave through Jorehaut, had on coming and going, interviews with the young Saring Rajah Kandarpeshwar Singh and offered the assistance of the men of both Regiments to

⁷² Judicial Proceedings 24 December 1857, Letter Number: 211, Enclosure Number 149, 14 December 1857, WBSA; Judicial Proceedings 29 July 1858, Letter Number: 115, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁷³ Judicial Proceedings 24 December 1857, Letter Number: 211, Enclosure Number 149, 14 December 1857, WBSA; Judicial Proceedings 29 July 1858, Letter Number: 115, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁷⁴ Judicial Proceeding Number: 482, Government of Bengal, 17 September 1857, Letter from the Agent to the Governor General of North-East Frontier to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 29 August 1857, WBSA; Special Narrative Number 24, 12 September 1857, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

reinstate him on his throne and maintain the country for him.⁷⁵ Lieutenant Colonel F. Hannay, Commander of the 1st Assam Light Infantry, had also warned Jenkins about the treacherous nature of the Infantry since he was ‘well aware of the intriguing men in the Corps, as well as that amongst the Hindustanees... the brothers and relations of men whose Regiments have proved false, and I fear much more excitement on this head will take place when the mutiny of the Dinajepore Regiments is known.’⁷⁶ Mention may also be made in this context of the role of one native doctor Hydait Ali of the 1st Assam Light Infantry. In one of his confidential correspondence Colonel Hannay described him as a ‘clever, intelligent and a bigoted Mohamedan who possessed a tolerable knowledge of the English language and was imbued with all the prejudices of sectarianism.’⁷⁷ Hydait Ali was alleged to have lately assumed the role of a ‘spiritual leader among the class of Mohamedans’ in the corps and the station in Dibrugarh. He along with another Jamadar in the corps, Noor Mohamed, was reportedly holding regular meetings of ‘seditious nature’.⁷⁸ From some of the individuals who were cognisant of and shared in these discussions, it was learnt that they were trying to ‘contaminate the minds of the ignorant men in the

⁷⁵ Judicial Proceeding Number: 482, Government of Bengal, 17 September 1857, Letter from the Agent to the Governor General of North-East Frontier to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 29 August 1857, WBSA; Special Narrative Number 24, 12 September 1857, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

⁷⁶ Lieutenant Colonel F. Hannay, Commanding officer of the 1st Assam Light Infantry to Colonel F. Jenkins, Agent Governor General NE Frontier, Home Public Proceeding Number: 199, Dibrugarh 16 November 1857, Letter Number: 8 December 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

⁷⁷ Confidential Letter Number 4, 15 September 1857, Papers Relating to the East India Mutiny, HCPP Accounts and Papers in Fourteen Volumes (5.) East Indies, Session 3 February – 19 April 1859, Volume: XVIII, 1859, p.19, BLOC.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

corps' and were planning the feasibility of seizing the guns from the station.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Colonel Jenkins was also sceptical about the conduct of the sepoy of 2nd Assam Light Infantry. Although the Hindustani sepoy were relatively few in number, Jenkins apprehended that their influence over the other sepoy in the regiment were great and would be able to sway them against the colonial government.⁸⁰

4.6 PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES ADOPTED BY THE COLONIAL GOVERNMENT

The colonial government considered it necessary to reassess the whole situation and take appropriate steps to counter this impending storm that was threatening to engulf the entire province. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the government had earlier sent a few detachments of sepoy of the 1st Assam Light Infantry towards Jalpaiguri in order to counter the mutiny of the sepoy of the 73rd Native Infantry.⁸¹ In addition there was severe paucity of the European troops and artillery in the whole of the North-East Frontier at the time, since most of the European troops were already engaged in bitter fight with the mutineers in the Gangetic heartland. Apprehending an impending attack from the rebellious groups in the province many of the European planters and English civilians left their property

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Letter from Colonel Jenkins, Agent to the Governor-General North-East Frontier to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 29 August 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number: 482, 17 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁸¹ Forwarded letter from Mr J.D Gordon, Joint Magistrate at Julpigoree, referring to the insubordinate state of the 73rd Native Infantry to the Commissioner of Assam, dated 15 August 1857, Judicial Proceeding Number: 228, Letter Number: 81, 17 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

and took shelter inside churches or were driven underground while others boarded country boats and lived mainstream till relief came.⁸²

Under the prevailing circumstances, Colonel Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General of the North-East Frontier, pleaded to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal to post in Assam a detachment of two companies of European Infantry along with the European Artillery consisting of at least two guns.⁸³ In addition, he also requested the Governor General in Council to dispatch a detachment of European mariners and sailors by steamer or a light boat to Dibrugarh as soon as possible in order to 'save the province from the revolution' along with the hope that would help infuse 'confidence in all the parties, secure the allegiance of any who might be wavering and repress any hidden feeling of disaffection.'⁸⁴ However, it was easier said than done. Even though the authorities back in Calcutta could manage to spare some European troops for the service to Assam, which was indeed difficult for them to arrange at the time because of the paucity of the troops in the context of the intensification of the rebellion in the northern India, it would be extremely hazardous to move the reinforcements up through the Brahmaputra river during the rainy season. Nevertheless, considering the exigency of the situation, a small body of the European force of 104 men –under the command of Lieutenant Davis was ordered to be despatched to Dibrugarh without any further delay.⁸⁵ This amphibious force – half

⁸² Benudhar Sharma, *The Rebellion of 1857 Vis-a-Vis Assam*, Gauhati: B. Sharma, 1958.

⁸³ Home Public Proceeding Number: 18 December 1857, *Forwarded copy of papers on the present state of affairs in Assam and the advisability of placing a detachment of two companies of European Infantry and of European Artillery of two guns of its having been determined to send with the party of European seamen there.*, Letter Number: 8 December 1857 Number 57, NAI.

⁸⁴ Judicial Proceedings Number: 482, 17 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁸⁵ Judicial Proceeding Number: 484, Letter Number: 1809, 17 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

of whom had some kind of military training while the rest were seamen and were newly recruited for the purpose – left in the month of September 1857 on board the ‘Haroonghatta’ along with some supplies of medicines, arms and ammunition including two twelve pounder guns.⁸⁶

Luckily for the colonial administration there were still a few groups in the region who remained loyal towards the Raj, in spite of the repeated attempts made by the Hindustani factions amongst the sepoys to lure them away. Unlike the 1st regiment of the Assam Light Infantry, which was comprised mostly of the Hindustani sepoys, the regiment of the 2nd Light Infantry, stationed in Gauhati, was more heterogeneous in its structural composition. Although initially the authorities in Dibrugarh, the head-quarters of the Assam Light Infantry, had reason to suspect the behaviour of the whole regiments, but later they were persuaded to believe that at least some of them would remain loyal and stand by their officers in command. The 2nd regiment, apart from a few Hindustani sepoys, was comprised mainly of the local recruits and the Nepalese, in addition to the Gurkhas, whom the administration believed would remain faithful towards them even under the present situation.⁸⁷ In order to thwart the imminent rebellion in the province, arrangements were thus being made so as to bring all these groups of men and others who were available from the outlying detachments – the Rabhas, the Manipuris and other non-Hindustanis – to the head quarter and place them in the various regimental lines around the

⁸⁶ Judicial Proceedings Number: 306, 1 October 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁸⁷ Lieutenant Colonel Hannay, commanding the 1st Assam Light Infantry, to Colonel F. Jenkins, Agent Governor General NE Frontier Judicial Proceeding Number 482, 17 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

province.⁸⁸ Some of the 'able bodied' Nepali men were also recruited as a sort of military Police in order to maintain order in the stations. As a precautionary measure, in the district of Nowgong, Mr Morton, the Principal Assistant, destroyed the bridges over the rivers Missa and Diyu, and cut off all communications from Jorhat to prevent the rebels from entering the province from that direction.⁸⁹ In addition to this, Major Richardson, commanding the 2nd Assam Light Infantry, suggested the formation of an independent body of artillery for lower Assam as a temporary measure. Consequently, he was authorised to raise a party of Cacharis or other local recruits for the service since the authorities apprehended that it might not be possible for them to command the service of the Captain Reid's Company of Artillery, which was completely made up of Hindustani sepoys.⁹⁰ The colonial administration was extremely worried about the safety of the post in Dibrugarh because being the headquarters of the Assam Light Infantry, there were four 6 pounder Field guns, two twelve-pounder Howitzers and about sixty native artillery-men, and nearly all of whom were Hindustanis. As a precautionary measure, all the extra powder and the gun ammunitions were put in the fortified square and two six-pounder guns along with a party of picked men were put into the fortified square as a measure of defence in case of necessity, leaving the remaining two 6 pounders in the gun-shed of the artillery company, under charge of the officer commanding and his European non-

⁸⁸ Jenkins to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Proceeding Number: 482, 17 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁸⁹ Bivar to Jenkins, Judicial Proceedings Number: 460, 24 September, 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁹⁰ Jenkins to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Proceeding Number: 482, 17 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

commissioned officer.⁹¹ In addition the officials feared that the disbanded sepoys would 'take advantage of any commotions to join any bands with whom they may have already connection', and thus decided to place armed bodies of men totally distinct from the present Police under the control of 'the most respectable of the European planters.'⁹²

4.7 THE TURNING POINT OF THE INTENDED REBELLION IN ASSAM

The colonial government thus had genuine grounds to be extremely concerned regarding the situation in the North-East Frontier and had definite reasons to take immediate appropriate steps to avoid the danger that was beginning to threaten their presence in the province. The 'rebels' too gauged that the time was ripe for them to strike. Accordingly, they tried to finalise their plan and fixed the date of attack in early October when Maniram was supposed to return to Assam with additional reinforcements.⁹³ On that date, it was planned that all the sepoys would rise simultaneously at the various headquarters, seize the magazines and artilleries, release the prisoners, kill the Europeans and burn their properties after which they would march to Jorhat and proclaim the young Kandarpeswar Singha as the Rajah of

⁹¹ Papers Relating to the East India Mutiny, HCPP: Accounts and Papers in Fourteen Volumes (5.) East Indies, Session 3 February – 19 April 1859, vols. XVIII, 1859, p. 16, BLOC.

⁹² Judicial Proceeding Number: 231, Number 82, 17 September 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

⁹³ Lieutenant Hannay commanding 1st Assam Light Infantry to Colonel Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General Northeast Frontier, Home Public Proceedings Number 198, 16 November 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

Assam.⁹⁴ One may pause here to see the remarkable similarity and pattern between the intended uprising in Assam and that of the Gangetic heartland. As have been discussed in details in the previous chapters, these were ‘not just a symptom of mindless pathological disorder on the part of the rebels... but a common phenomenon in the popular movements involving crowds.’⁹⁵ That there was a definite plan for the future and a concerted action on the part of the ‘mutineers’ is evident from the following deposition of Keramat Ali, one of the native doctors of the Golaghat regiment:

... Maniram was to be the Prime Minister... that Mudoo Mullick was to be immediately under him in rank and position... that he (Peali) was to be the *Barbhandar Barua*, Lockeenath Hensoa Barua was to be the *Nowbaisa Phukan*... that Kamala Saringia Barua was to be made *Subadar* and *Darogah* of Jorhat... there would be no *Khazana* [revenue] but *liksos* as in older times...no revenue on *barilands* and [only] one rupee per *poorali* on the *rupit* lands as in former times; that all the *Sahibs* from Gauhati up to Dibrugarh were to be [transferred] to Jorhat and made over to the *Rajah*. That Roostam Singh [and] Noor Muhammad were to be *Subedars*...⁹⁶

However, there had to be a change of plan on the part of the rebels because of the precautionary measures that were being adopted by the colonial government. The

⁹⁴ “Deposition of Keramat Ally native doctor of Golaghat taken on solemn affirmation by Captain Holroyd Principal Assistant Commissioner at Jorahaut on 7 November 1857”, Home Public Proceeding Numbers: 198-199, 16 November 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

⁹⁵ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 71; George Rude, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959, Ch. 13.

⁹⁶ “Deposition of Keramat Ally native doctor of Golaghat taken on solemn affirmation by Captain Holroyd Principal Assistant Commissioner at Jorahaut on 7 November 1857”, Home Public Proceeding Numbers: 198-199, 16 November 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

news of the arrival of the steamer carrying the Europeans in a few days' time had already reached and rumours were afloat that all the 'Sahibs' would soon be leaving the country in that boat, carrying with them all the treasure and ammunitions.⁹⁷ There were also vague reports that Mr. Masters, the sub-Assistant of the Golaghat division, had fled to the Sadar station in Sibsagar. The rebels were beginning to believe that a full-scale mutiny had already taken place at the headquarters and that unless they took immediate actions 'the Sahibs might just escape by the steamer before they could kill them.'⁹⁸ While some of them were of the opinion that they should be cautious and wait till the time was opportune for taking actions, others suggested 'to act at once in matters like this kind' and said that 'if the steamer in the meantime come up and took away the treasure and the Sahibs, it would be a disgrace before the Rajah [Kandarpeswar Singh] that they could not seize the magazine or the treasure and kill the Sahibs.'⁹⁹

Keramat Ali, one of the native doctors of the Golaghat regiment described the exact details of the plan that the rebels had charted out. According to his deposition, the rebels had made plans to march to the head-quarter in Jorhat and cut the head off the Darogah Harannath Baruah. Next they were to persuade the Jamadar Raghuveer Singh in Jorhat and along with him twenty other sepoy, who were still loyal to the colonial government, failing which they would kill him. Having secured their victory

⁹⁷ Deposition of Keramat Ally Native Doctor of Golaghat taken on solemn affirmation by Captain Holroyd Principal Assistant Commissioner at Jorehaut on 7 November 1857, Home Public Proceeding Number: 198, 16 November 1857, NAI.

⁹⁸ Deposition of Keramat Ally Native Doctor of Golaghat taken on solemn affirmation by Captain Holroyd Principal Assistant Commissioner at Jorehaut on 7 November 1857, Home Public Proceeding Number: 198, 16 November 1857, NAI.

⁹⁹ "The deposition of Keramat Ally", Home Public Proceeding Number: 198, 16 November, 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

in Jorhat, the rebels then planned to collect the arms and ammunitions along with the elephants from the head-quarter in Jorhat and reinstate Kandarpeswar Singha to the throne. Once that was done, they would then march straight to Shibsagar, set fire at Colonel Holroyd's house and kill all the European officials and residents, seize all the money and ammunitions, and persuade the native sepoys stationed there to join their side. Finally, leaving a few sepoys there to guard the post, the rebels would then march to Dibrugarh and planned to conduct the similar operation as in Shibsagar.¹⁰⁰ The detailed description of the impending plan of attack by the rebels, as provided by Keramat Ali in his deposition, is significant in two major ways: first, the fear and apprehension of the European residents (both civil and official) in the region about an open outbreak of rebellion and their possible annihilation were not completely unjustified. Second, the way the rebels had charted out the impending attack, indicates that they were cognisant of the whole situation and knew exactly what needed to be done. Also the eye-witness first person narrative of Keramat Ali, being a native account, provides us with an important source material in this context.

In the end, the above mentioned plan could not be executed. This was perhaps the most crucial turning point of the intended rebellion in the region. Opinion was divided amongst the rebels. Keramat Ali and a few others tried to argue that it was better to 'act with circumspection and wait till the next morning, making all the preparations during the night.'¹⁰¹ Shaikh Bhikan, the Subadar of the detachment in Golaghat too grudgingly agreed to this. Keramat Ali also pointed out the fact that at

¹⁰⁰ "The deposition of Keramat Ally", Home Public Proceedings Number: 198, 16 November, 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁰¹ "The deposition of Keramat Ally", Home Public Proceedings Number: 198, 16 November, 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

that moment there were only about fifty sepoys who were ready for the action. They should rather wait for the Jamadar in Borpathar to arrive with his men from the Command post, along with a few others from Jamuguri district.¹⁰² Finally, after a long deliberation, the rebels decided to defer the whole scheme of action for the time being, and in this way, inadvertently provided the colonial administration the much needed breathing space to regroup and reconfigure their options. Almost immediately, upon the receipt of the secret intelligence of the proceedings in Golaghat, the commander in charge of the 1st Assam Light Infantry battalion, Colonel Hannay, ordered the arrest of Subadar Shaikh Bhikan and other 'ring-leaders' of the detachment and sent them to Dibrugarh to stand trial before the court martial.¹⁰³ As for the rest of the detachment in Golaghat, they were brought under control by introducing strict disciplinary measures by Raghubir Singh, appointed as the Subadar of the detachment.¹⁰⁴

4.8 THE SUPPRESSION OF THE INTENDED REBELLION

The rebels, who included the detachments of sepoys as well as a section of the Ahom nobles, were primarily guided by the secret proceedings that were being sent by Maniram Diwan who was then residing in Calcutta. Most of these deliberations were addressed to the 'Rajah' of Assam, Kandarpeswar Singha. To carry on his

¹⁰² "Deposition of Subedar Seik Bhikan", forwarded letter from the Assistant Commissioner of Assam to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Home Public Proceedings Number 202, 18 November 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁰³ Letter sent from Colonel Hannay to Colonel F. Jenkins dated 18 August 1857, Foreign Department Proceedings Number 335, 22 September 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁰⁴ Letter sent from Colonel Hannay to Colonel F. Jenkins, Foreign Department Proceedings Number 335, 22 November 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

correspondence from Calcutta, the Diwan used to engage various persons, in the guise of ‘Fakirs’ or religious mendicants. These people, also known as *Bhats*, were generally recruited from the Gujarati communities.¹⁰⁵ Around that time the officer-in-charge at Jorhat was Haranath Parbatia Barua who remained staunchly loyal towards the British administration and had virtually proclaimed himself as the de-facto ‘King’ of Assam. Haranath was able to apprehend one such *Bhat* and came to know from the letters he was carrying about the ‘seditious messages’ that were being sent by the Diwan from Calcutta for the intended rising in Assam.¹⁰⁶ Although the letter itself was intended for Piyali Barua, but the address it had on, was that of King Kandarpeswar Singha. Sensing the urgency of the whole situation Haranath Barua wasted no time informing the Commissioner of Assam about the complicity of Kandarpeswar Singh and the Diwan in the plot against the colonial government.¹⁰⁷ Together with the Darogah Haranath Barua and his assistant Umed Munshi, Colonel Holroyd, the then Assistant Commissioner of Assam, discreetly organised a vigorous search for discovering the hidden traces of the projected rebellion in the light of the Diwan’s letter.¹⁰⁸ Quite expectedly, they were successful in unearthing various letters and exchanges between the King and the Diwan.¹⁰⁹ It was therefore decided to raid the palace of the King and apprehend the King himself without further delay.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Sharma, *The Rebellion of 1857 Vis-a-Vis Assam*: p. 164.

¹⁰⁶ Forwarded letter from Darogah Haranauth Baruah sent to Colonel F. Jenkins dated 23 August 1857, Foreign Department Proceedings Number 98, 10 September 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁰⁷ Letter sent from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of India Military Department, Home Public Proceedings Number 278, 16 October 1857, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁰⁸ Judicial Proceedings Number: 334, 29 October 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁰⁹ See the Appendix E for the details of the letters sent from Maniram Diwan.

¹¹⁰ Holroyd to Hannay, Judicial Proceedings Number: 277, 22 October 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

However, initially the authorities wanted to tread with caution lest any haste in the seizure of the King should precipitate the crisis further.¹¹¹

In the beginning of September, when the position of the colonial administration was once again strengthened by the arrival of fresh reinforcements from various quarters, Colonel Holroyd, along with a party of 20 men, joined Captain Lowther from Dibrugarh at a place called Dikhowmukh to apprehend the young Rajah and his close associates who were allegedly involved in the conspiracy to overthrow the British rule from the region.¹¹² Captain Lowther was the 2nd in Command of the 1st Assam Light Infantry and in charge of a platoon of Gurkhas. Together, they proceeded towards Jorhat in the most discreet way possible to avoid any trouble from the mutinous corps at Golaghat.¹¹³ The entire operation was carried out while it was still dark and the party, headed by Captain Lowther and Colonel Holroyd along with the armed men, were able to successfully surround the whole palace and the King along with his entourage.¹¹⁴ At around the same time, a detachment was also sent to the house of Madhu Mallik, situated in the nearby Bazar at Jorhat, and was arrested without much of an effort.¹¹⁵ Under the instruction and supervision of Colonel Holroyd and Captain Lowther, the residences of the Rajah and his minister, Madhu

¹¹¹ Judicial Proceedings Number: 278, 22 October 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹¹² Holroyd to Jenkins, Agent Governor General NE Frontier, Dated Sibsagar 12 September 1857, Judicial Proceeding Number: 276, 22 October 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹¹³ Jenkins to A.R. Young, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Dated Gowhatty 17 September 1857, Judicial Proceeding Number: 276, 22 October 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA; For further details see HCPP: Accounts and Papers: Fourteen Volumes. (5.) East Indies. Mutiny [etc.], Session 3 February-19 April 1859, Vol. XVIII, 1859, pp. 16-18, BLOC.

¹¹⁴ Holroyd to Jenkins, Dated Sibsagar 12 September 1857, Judicial Proceeding Number: 276, 22 October, 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹¹⁵ Holroyd to Jenkins, Dated Sibsagar 12 September 1857, Judicial Proceeding Number: 276, 22 October, 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

Mallik, were carefully searched throughout the day and a number of arms and relevant documents were recovered from them. It was however admitted by Colonel Holroyd that they were unable to secure the documents that were directly related to the intended rebellion.¹¹⁶

After his arrest, the young prince Kandarpeswar Singh was, immediately sent to Mahghur, and from there to Calcutta and was confined as a state prisoner at the Central jail in Alipur.¹¹⁷ While in Calcutta, with the help of his solicitor Mr Ferguson, Kandarpeswar appealed for his defence to the charges of complicity in the conspiracy against the British government.¹¹⁸ Considering his young age, utter ignorance of the political developments in the province, and the fact that he was not proved to be a voluntary agent in the ‘conspiracy’, the Commissioner decided to not bring him to trial and subsequently, was released from jail. But considering the political situation he was not allowed to return to his ancestral home in Jorhat but was ‘interned at Burdwan’ where he lived till December 1860.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, in light of the fact that the former sovereign of Assam was living in an extremely miserable financial condition, the Governor General in Council later agreed to sanction young Kandarpeswar Singh a pension, without any arrears, to be effected

¹¹⁶ Holroyd to Jenkins, Dated Sibsagar 12 September 1857, Judicial Proceeding Number: 276, 22 October, 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹¹⁷ A.R. Young to the Superintendent of Alipur Jail dated September 30 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number: 278, 22 October 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹¹⁸ Forwarded Petition of Kandarpeswar Singh, Rajah of Assam, from G.S. Tagan Esquire, Barrister at Law, to F.J. Halliday, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, dated 9 December 1857, Judicial Proceeding Number 23, 24 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹¹⁹ Hazarika, *Political Life in Assam During the Nineteenth Century*: p. 363.

from February 1864, with the condition that he would not be allowed to visit Upper Assam.¹²⁰

The arrest of Kandarpeswar Singh was immediately followed by the arrest of the other rebel leaders which included Piyali Barua, Madhu Mallik, Dutiram Barua, Shaikh Farmud, Marangikhowa Gohain, Madhura Koch and others who were allegedly involved, directly or indirectly, in the whole conspiracy.¹²¹ It was however absolutely essential for the administration to arrest Maniram Diwan, the chief architect behind the whole scheme of things, and be brought to trial as soon as possible.¹²² Accordingly therefore, orders were immediately issued to arrest the Diwan, then residing in Calcutta, and be brought to Jorhat to be tried in a special court, now made possible under the Act XIV of 1857.¹²³ Both Maniram and Piyali Barua, who was acting as the advisor to Kandarpeswar Singh on behalf of Maniram Diwan, were tried, convicted and found guilty of treason against the state. The trial was a complete mockery of the Rule of Law. The accused were neither given a fair hearing nor allowed to cross examine witnesses. The Act XIV of 1857 had empowered Colonel Holroyd, the Principal Assistant Commissioner of Sibsagar district, to act as the Prosecutor as well as the Judge for the trial. That it was nothing short of a 'Kangaroo Trial' was evident from Colonel Holroyd's words: 'We will

¹²⁰ Barpujari, *Assam in the Days of the Company*: pp. 178-79.

¹²¹ Holroyd to Jenkins, Dated 26 November 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number: 154, 14 January 1858, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹²² Hannay to Jenkins, Home Public Proceedings Number: 199, Dated Dibrugarh 16 November 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹²³ Judicial Proceedings Number 166 dated 24 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA; Judicial Proceedings Number 171-72 dated 31 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

hang you first, try you afterwards.’¹²⁴ Piyali Barua along with Maniram Diwan, who was brought from Calcutta on board the ‘Koladyne’ along with about one hundred odd European sailors, were tried on 9 February and 23 February 1858 respectively, were found guilty of treason and conspiracy against the state and were sentenced to death. Both of them were publicly hanged on the same day, 26 February 1858.¹²⁵ As far as the rest were concerned – Madhu Mallik, Dutiram Barua, Marangikhowa Gohain amongst others – were also tried and convicted of treason and transported for life.¹²⁶ However, following the Queen’s Proclamation in 1858 when the general amnesty was finally announced, a few of them, namely, Dutiram Barua and Shaikh Farmud and a few others were released from their penal settlement and were allowed to return to their province.¹²⁷

But even after the arrest and subsequent trial of the principal actors involved in the intended rebellion, the colonial government continued to remain apprehensive about the possibility of the rebellion in the region. There was no doubt that the movement had lost its momentum, but it was still far from being under control. Although at the beginning of October, Colonel Jenkins reported that there was no further reason for apprehension of any outbreak in Assam, but later in the same month, the Chairman of the Assam Tea Company, D.C. Mackey, in a letter to the Secretary to the Government of India expressed their deep anxiety, stating that great disaffection still very much existed amongst the sepoys at Dibrugarh and feared that

¹²⁴ Hazarika, *Political Life in Assam During the Nineteenth Century*: p. 364; Sharma, *Empire's Garden*: p. 133.

¹²⁵ Statement of cases tried under Act XIV of 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number: 619, 24 June 1858, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹²⁶ Statement of cases tried under Act XIV of 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number: 619, 24 June 1858, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹²⁷ Barpujari, *Assam in the Days of the Company*: p. 178.

this might be simultaneous with the descent of the predatory tribes from the neighbouring hills.¹²⁸ Mackey feared that the ‘setting in of the dry season greatly facilitates the movement of the sepoys, and is the time always selected by the savaged in the hills for carrying out their war-like expeditions’ and under these circumstances, he wrote, ‘we are entering upon a more dangerous period on that frontier than has been since the commencement of the outbreak and it seems evident that the small force of half-trained seamen [which was] already sent up are inadequate to secure the safety of the province.’¹²⁹ This apprehension on the part of the administration was further worsened by subsequent events around the province.

The seven companies of the 34th Native Infantry stationed at Barrackpore had already been disarmed following Mangal Pandey’s mutiny.¹³⁰ The three remaining companies of the 34th, i.e., the 2nd, 3rd and the 4th, were garrisoned at Chittagong. On the night of 18 November these three detachments stationed at Chittagong had mutinied.¹³¹ They plundered the treasury, released the prisoners from jail, killed one of the jail barkandazes (an armed retainer or a policeman), burnt down their own lines, fired the magazines and then left the station, carrying off with them three government elephants and the whole of the treasure they found in the office of the

¹²⁸ Judicial Proceedings Number: 326, 29 October 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA; also, C. E. Buckland, *Bengal under the Lieutenant-Governors: Being a Narrative of the Principal Events and Public Measures During Their Periods of Office, from 1854 to 1898*, 2 vols., Calcutta: S. K. Lahiri & Co., 1901., Vide Appendix for the Minute on September 30, 1858 by F.J. Halliday, “The Mutinies as they affected the Lower Provinces under the Government of Bengal,” pp. 154-155.

¹²⁹ Mackey to Beadon, Secretary to the Government of India, dated 24 October 1857, Judicial Proceedings Number: 218a, 19 November 1857, WBSA.

¹³⁰ See Chapter 2 for details.

¹³¹ See Chapter 3 for details.

collectorate.¹³² From Chittagong the mutineers headed towards the princely state of Tripura. After a few days in the hills and jungles of Tripura they tried to enter into Cachar and thereafter to Manipur.¹³³ Although the rebels were finally defeated at a place known as Latu in Sylhet, it was later reported that rest of the Chittagong mutineers were on their way to Dacca to join the sepoy of the 73rd Native Infantry, but had changed their course and crossed the Tipperah Hills to join the men stationed at Sylhet. A few of them were captured but the bulk managed to escape. The situation was further compounded by the fact that the rebellion in Chittagong was almost immediately followed by the outburst in Dhaka. On 21 November 1857, the intelligence of the Chittagong mutiny reached Dhaka and soon after that the 73rd regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry rose in rebellion. Although the authorities were somewhat successful in taking control of the situation and apprehended a few of the rebellious sepoy of the 73rd regiment, the main body of the Dhaka rebels passed through Mymensingh and reached the district of Rungpore. By the end of November, the Magistrate of Mymensingh reported that a party of about 150 sepoy passed through that station, having committed some depredations on their route, without attacking the station.¹³⁴ It was later reported by Lieutenant E.R. Wilcox of

¹³² HCPP Further Papers (Number 9 in continuation of Number 7), Insurrection in the East Indies Presented to both the Houses of Parliament, Enclosure in Number 5, Special Narrative of Events Dated December 5, 1857, pp. 326-327, BLOC.

¹³³ HCPP Further Papers (Number 9 in continuation of Number 7), Insurrection in the East Indies Presented to both the Houses of Parliament, p. 327, BLOC.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 333.

73rd Native Infantry stationed at Jalpaiguri that the Dacca mutineers were on their way to Bhutan.¹³⁵

All these incidents happening around the province was enough to put the administration in a state of considerable alarm throughout the period. Quite understandably it was apprehended that these rebels might well try to get in touch with the disbanded sepoys at Golaghat and Dibrugarh and create further trouble. That their apprehension was not completely unfounded is evident from the fact that the Dhaka fugitives in their north-ward march, after crossing the river Brahmaputra at Chilmari, destroyed the local police station at Karaibari in the south-west of Gowalpara, plundered the market and carried off with them the Jamadar and the Barkandazes attached to the outpost.¹³⁶ Also, as Jenkins mentioned in his letter to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal that 'had they turned towards the east instead of the north and in concert with the sepoys of the 34th Native Infantry succeeded in detaching a portion of the Sylhet Light Infantry, the situation would have been out of control, particularly at a moment when the authorities in Calcutta could hardly spare any troops.'¹³⁷ Considering the situation, at the end of December 1857, the Chairman of the Assam Tea Company again called the attention of the government to the defenceless state of Assam and to the danger that was likely to result from the mutinies at Dhaka and Chittagong.¹³⁸ A similar recommendation was made by Colonel Hannay which mentioned that some disaffection still existed amongst the

¹³⁵ For further details see HCPP Further Papers (Number 8 in Continuation of Number 6), Relative to the Insurrection in the East Indies, Presented to both the Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1858, Enclosure 81 and 82 in Number 2, pp.: 69-70, BLOC.

¹³⁶ Buckland, *Bengal under the Lieutenant-Governors*: p. 155.

¹³⁷ Judicial Proceeding Number: 735-37, 31 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹³⁸ Judicial Proceeding Number 736, 31 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

men of the detachment at Golaghat. It was finally decided by the authorities in Calcutta to dispatch to Assam a second party of one hundred seamen with three European officers on 31 December 1857.¹³⁹ It was only after the Commissioner of Assam in his letter had expressed his satisfaction that he was no longer apprehensive of any danger from those quarters, that the Government of India could breathe a sigh of relief, though not without a lingering suspicion.¹⁴⁰

This chapter has limited its scope mainly to the province of Assam. However, it would be indeed important to investigate in further details the responses from the other princely states of Manipur, Tripura and the Khasi-Jaintia hills. Even a cursory sifting of the primary documents clearly points out to the fact that the colonial government were highly suspicious and had a tough time dealing with the disgruntled Manipuri princes and sections of the hill tribes in the region during this time of crisis. It was reported that the princes of Manipur along with his followers joined the Chittagong mutineers.¹⁴¹ An official report also runs to the effect that the Manipuri princes were in operation on the bank of the river Barak. Probably as a sequel to this several princes of the Manipur royal family were kept under detention in the Cachar jail.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Buckland, *Bengal under the Lieutenant-Governors*: p. 155.

¹⁴⁰ Judicial Proceeding Numbers 737, 31 December 1857, Government of Bengal, WBSA.

¹⁴¹ Letter from the Political Agent at Manipur to the Officiating Secretary of the Government of India in Bengal, Home Public Proceeding Number: 112, dated 17 April 1858, Government of Bengal, NAI; Letter sent from Lieutenant R. Stewart Officiating Superintendent, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 13 January 1858, Home Public Proceedings Number 55, 26 January 1858, Government of Bengal, NAI.

¹⁴² For further details on Manipur and Tripura, see the Foreign Department Proceedings 1850-1859, Home Public Proceedings 1857-58, Home Political Consultations 1860; also, Correspondence between the Agent in the North East Frontier and government of Fort William regarding Manipur

4.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter provides an interesting contrast on the nature of intended rebellion in Assam vis-à-vis the lower province of the Bengal presidency. One may safely draw a few inferences based on the present discussion. Assam, unlike the lower province of Bengal, came under the colonial dominion much later, about twenty years prior to the outbreak of the rebellion of 1857. It was only after the expulsion of the Burmese that the Company officials decided to set up their bases in the province. The colonial intervention in Assam, unlike some of the other parts of India, was a relatively peaceful process whereby the erstwhile Ahom nobles literally invited them to take control of the province. This is evident from the initial discussion in the present chapter how the Ahom nobles, including Maniram Diwan, had upheld the cause of the British intervention in Assam. However, the introduction of British rule necessitated a fundamental alteration of the traditional socio-political set-up and the landed hierarchy in the province. The erstwhile landed aristocracy soon found themselves in a precarious situation whereby all their privileges were soon taken away. Nevertheless, although it did not take them long to realise the adverse effects of the British rule in the province, the Ahom nobilities and the landed aristocrats never really managed to put up a strong and united resistance against the Raj. Instead, the constant feudal feuds amongst the princes of the Ahom nobilities, coupled with a lack of a proper leadership further strengthened the authority of the British rule. Maniram Diwan later realised that in order to have a strong and united

affairs. Foreign Miscellaneous 1830-32 (247-249) 3 volumes, NAI; Judicial Department Proceedings 1857-58, Government of Bengal, WBSA; HCPP Further Papers (Number 9 in continuation of Number 7), Insurrection in the East Indies Presented to both the Houses of Parliament, Enclosure in Number 5, BLOC; also, Sujit Choudhury, *The Mutiny Period in Cachar, Silchar*: Tagore Society for Cultural Integration, 1981.

force capable of resisting the colonial rule in a province that was yet to come out of its traditional feudal setup it was essential to rally behind the King of Assam. It was precisely for this reason that he continued to press for the cause of young Kandarpeswar Singh. But his hopes were continued to be belied. It was only after the rebellion of 1857 broke out in the various parts of the country and the initial success of the rebels in the north central Gangetic heartland that provided Maniram with a new opportunity.

Unlike the lower presidency of Bengal, Assam had all the prerequisites – the army composition that had local recruits loyal to the King; a class of dissatisfied feudal aristocrats desperately seeking to regain their lost power, position and fortune; a considerable proportion of the civil population who were ready to rally themselves behind the King; a playmaker who was cognisant of the prevailing situation in the region and also in the country – for a full-scale open outbreak of rebellion. Also, what distinguished this intended rebellion of 1857 from that of the earlier instances of rebellious outbursts in the region was the way in which Maniram made the plans under the aegis of the King, thereby bringing together various sections of the disgruntled population under one roof. The networks of communication that the rebel leaders managed to establish within the region in tune with the situation in north central Gangetic heartland during the rebellion of 1857, clearly pertains to the fact that the leaders realised the need to align themselves with the broader conflagration in order to successfully thwart the colonial rule. This is evident from the way the intended rebellion was planned. As the chapter showed it was only after the news of the mutiny of the Danapur regiment, the participation of Kunwar Singh of Bihar in the rebellion, and the fall of Delhi in the hands of the mutineers that the plan for

insurrection intensified in Assam. The subsequent course of events unfolding in the north-central Gangetic heartland, the impending attack in Calcutta, followed by the rumours about the fall of the British rule, convinced the insurgents in Assam about the vulnerable state of affairs for the British and the time was opportune for them to execute their plan into action.

In the end however the rebellion failed to make an impact in Assam. The reason for this was the lack of coordination between the nobilities and the sepoys in the region. In addition, the fact that the rebel leaders had to depend almost entirely on the intelligence that was being sent by Maniram Diwan from Calcutta did not help their cause either. The Diwan who was living in Calcutta during the time of the rebellion was not always able to measure the situation that prevailed in Assam. By the time Maniram's intelligence reached Assam, the prevailing situation there or in the Gangetic heartland would have changed and therefore the sepoys as well as the nobility in Assam often found themselves in a situation whereby they were unable to decide the next appropriate move. This was primarily due to the fact that the rebel leaders, in order to keep the secrecy of the informations, resorted to alternative informal agencies of communications that were far more effective in the Gangetic heartland. On the other hand, the presence of Colonel Hannay and Major Jenkins at the headquarters of the rebels made it possible for them to take decisions according to the expediency of the situation. This delay in action on the part of the rebel leaders and sepoys in Assam provided the colonial authorities much needed time to take precautionary measures against the impending rebellion. Finally, the intended rebellion in Assam started far too late to be successful. The tentative date chosen by the rebels was in the month of October 1857. But already by the end of September

the rebellion in Delhi and its surrounding areas had been suppressed and the colonial authority in the region was re-established.¹⁴³ It was therefore possible for the authorities in Calcutta to send in fresh reinforcements. But had the movement begun earlier, situation might well have been different. In short, the alternative polity that the rebels tried to reconstruct did not have adequate time and opportunity to strike roots in Assam.

¹⁴³ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: p. 91.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE REBELLION OF 1857 AND THE MIDDLE CLASS INTELLIGENTSIA OF BENGAL

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The last three chapters dealt with the socio-political history of the rebellion in the lower province of the Bengal Presidency and Assam, looking at some of the moments of crisis within a historical perspective. It becomes evident that the movement was indeed a complex and multidimensional one whose ideological ramification also varied across the provinces. This chapter looks at the reactions and responses of a class of people – stereotyped as the ‘loyal’ subjects of the British Empire – during the rebellion of 1857. It has been said that the urban middle class intelligentsia of Bengal, also referred to as the *bhadralok*, looked at the establishment of colonial rule as an act of Providence that was destined to deliver the Indian nation from medieval backwardness and set it in the path of modernisation and progress. When this modernisation agenda was seemingly threatened by the uprising of 1857, this ‘loyalty’ of the Bengali intelligentsia found an unabashed expression, heavily criticising the ‘rebels’ through their writings and speeches.

Judith Brown has argued that these men had material interests, and often a deep, ideological commitment to new ideas. Hence, they expressed their loyalty and presented addresses of support to the government, instead of aligning with the rural

rebels and disgruntled sepoys.¹ Similarly, Partha Chatterjee, in an attempt to break away from the debilitating paradigm of Benedict Anderson, who has earlier argued that the idea of anti-colonial nationalism in the colonies were dependent on European models, drew a distinction between nationalism as a political movement which challenged the colonial state, and nationalism as a cultural construct that enabled the colonised to imagine their autonomy.² While the former was 'derivative' the latter drew its energies from the indigenous sources.³ A new binary was thus introduced, between the 'material' and 'spiritual' world. While in the 'spiritual' domain, the elites/nationalists created an 'autonomous' world of their own, but in the 'material' domain, Chatterjee argues, they were 'surrendering' in effect to the West in an effort to eradicate 'colonial difference'.⁴

But was this display of loyalty beyond question? Sumit Sarkar in his sharp rebuttal criticised the logic of this hypothesis, as propounded by Chatterjee. Sarkar argues, 'Here is a paradox indeed, for all commonsensically promising or effective ways of fighting colonial domination (mass political struggle, for instance, or even economic self-help) have become signs of surrender.'⁵ This 'commonsensically' effective means of resistance, I would argue in this chapter, was far from monochromatic. Rather, it was riddled with problems and regional specificities, as was illustrated during the rebellion of 1857. Benoy Ghosh had argued that it was not

¹ Judith M. Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy*, Short Oxford History of the Modern World, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 85.

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed., London: Verso, 1991.

³ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, London: Zed for the United Nations University, 1986.

⁴ Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 96.

⁵ Sarkar, *Writing Social History*: p. 96.

of course a 'slavish loyalty' but a 'conditional' support of the British government.⁶ He tried to explain that the middle class intelligentsia avoided the open confrontation with the Company's government since 'to support the rebels and their cause would have amounted at the time to a negation of all principles and ideals for which they had fought for over half a century'.⁷ In one of his later works, C.A. Bayly has argued that 'the boundary between "revolt" and "collaboration" was often very faint... many of those who apparently collaborated, the Calcutta Intelligentsia for instance, regarded the British with contempt at some level.'⁸ Similarly, Mushirul Hasan, while revisiting the works and responses of the Muslim intellectuals in northern India, has persuasively argued that for men of this generation and background, their responses towards the rebellion of 1857 were always going to be far more complex than the mere official narratives of loyalism and anti-imperialism dichotomy.⁹

Qualifying from these arguments, this chapter argues that both the logic put forward by Brown and the binary thesis of Chatterjee needs to be revisited. From the contemporary writings of the middle class intelligentsia of Bengal, it is evident that the spirit of resistance and critique of the colonial rule was not confined to the 'spiritual domain'. It also shows that even though the *bhadralok*, a term when translated literally means 'respectable people', did not appreciate the open outbursts

⁶ Benoy Ghosh, "The Bengali Intelligentsia and the Revolt," in P.C. Joshi (ed.), *Rebellion: 1857. A Symposium*, New Delhi: 1957: pp. 112-128, p. 113.

⁷ Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature: 1800-1910, Western Impact Indian Response*, Calcutta: Sahitya Akademi, 1991, p. 125.

⁸ Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*: p. 170.

⁹ Mushirul Hasan, "The Legacies of 1857 among the Muslim Intelligentsia of North India" in Crispin Bates (ed.) *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume 5: Muslim Dalit and Subaltern Narratives, London: Sage Publications, 2014, pp. 103-116. Also see: Mushirul Hasan, *A Moral Reckoning: Muslim Intellectuals in Nineteenth-Century Delhi*, London; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

of violence and the bloodshed during the rebellion, they perceived that substantial grievances (ranging from lack of empathy from the military administration to social discrimination and a sense of economic deprivation) motivated this insurrection. This led them to question the viability of the presence of the colonial rule in the subcontinent. The chapter argues that the uprising of 1857 had more subtle and nuanced reflections, and, the patterns and trajectories of response went beyond the simplistic categorisations as 'loyal' or 'rebel'. E.I. Brodtkin has pointed out that while in some instances this terminology can serve a useful purpose, 'perhaps more often than not the simplistic categorisation of the Indian actors in the drama as loyal or rebel serves mainly to confuse.'¹⁰ Although Brodtkin was not altogether against the idea of customary usage of the terminologies, he however pointed out that it would be improper to designate the vast majority of the politically active population of India as either 'rebel' or 'loyal'. As the chapter shows, in Bengal 'loyalism' of the intelligentsia contained internal dilemmas and contradictions, thus opening a space for moving beyond terminologies of 'loyalist' or 'rebel'. Contemporaries in Bengal viewed the armed rebellion of 1857 in north and central India and the situation in Bengal as two expressive facets and results of the same discontent. Opposition towards Company rule in Bengal was articulated in a rhetoric that was different from those of the 'rebel' leaders of 1857. The forms were different, but were connected by the common feeling of discontent and dissent.

Before going into the discussion on the contemporary reactions of the middle class intelligentsia in Bengal during the rebellion of 1857 it is necessary to have a brief look at the formation and positioning of this class vis-à-vis the colonial state.

¹⁰ E. I. Brodtkin, "The Struggle for Succession: Rebels and Loyalists in the Indian Mutiny of 1857," *Modern Asian Studies*, 6, no. 3, 1972: 277-90, p. 277.

The purpose of this section is not to engage ourselves with the various debates concerning the formation of the middle class, but to have a basic framework within which to understand and contextualise the responses of the intelligentsia during the rebellion of 1857.¹¹

5.2 FORMATION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IN COLONIAL BENGAL

The middle class, in the context of nineteenth century colonial Bengal, had a fluid identity eluding any particular socio-economic categorisation but is generally recognised as characteristics which serve as the primary markers of middle class identity namely the western education, a white collar job or ‘chakri’, and participation in a print culture.¹² Each of these characteristics can be attributed to the establishment of colonial rule in India which serves to highlight that the middle class in nineteenth century India was a product of British colonial rule and its instruments of governance. Formation of the middle class in colonial Bengal was the product of a

¹¹ For a detailed debate on the middle class of Bengal, see for instance John McGuire, *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadrakalok in Calcutta, 1857-1885*, Australian National University Monographs on South Asia, Canberra: ANU, 1983; Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*; Sarkar, *Writing Social History*; Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001; Tithi Bhattacharya, *The Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal (1848-85)*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005; Sanjay Joshi, ed. *The Middle Class in Colonial India*, Oxford in India Readings, New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

¹² Sarkar, *Writing Social History*: p. 232. According to John H. Broomfield the main criterion that distinguished between the ‘Bhadra’ and the ‘abhadra’, meaning the respectable and the others, was the bhadralok’s abstention from manual labour and the stigma attached to any sort of physical labour. See John Hindle Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal*: Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968, p. 6.

historical process growing in response to the changing forms of political, social, cultural and economic norms introduced by colonial rule.

The Bengali middle class, commonly known as the 'bhadralok', evolved with the evolution of colonial rule itself. Until the 1830s, the East India Company remained fairly reliant upon the Sanskrit and Persian knowing literati for purposes of administration and commerce. Due to the sustained use of Sanskrit for purposes of the state, Sanskrit scholars were assured of a sound future. However, the position of prestige that Sanskrit enjoyed and the culture of patronage that Sanskrit scholars received were waning by the 1840s. The triumph of Thomas Babington Macaulay and the 'Anglicist' over the 'Orientalists' in the 1830s marked an increase in the use of English for both education and administrative purposes while it simultaneously minimised the use of Sanskrit and denigrated the accomplishments of Indian civilisation.¹³ By emphasising English education the Anglicists attempted to create a class of native people who, as Macaulay famously put it, were 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.'¹⁴ Thus as Gauri Viswanathan has argued, the introduction of English became a tool of Empire.¹⁵

On the other hand decreasing use of Sanskrit made it increasingly difficult for the traditional literati to find means of gainful employment. It was under these circumstances that English education served as the primary means through which the middle class in colonial Bengal could continue to maintain their respectability as

¹³ Sarkar, *Writing Social History*: pp. 226-27; Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 109-17.

¹⁴ Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education" in Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*: p. 111.

¹⁵ Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 20.

well as find employment.¹⁶ As Tithi Bhattacharya notes, ‘for the salaried class of the bhadralok, education was not merely a source of material sustenance, but it was also the only register of self-identity.’¹⁷ This new form of education that now served as the only avenue for upward mobility was far more formal and examination centred. Therefore an entry into the service sector became dependent primarily on examinations and educational degrees, thereby changing the nature of educational system in colonial India.¹⁸ The introduction of cheap print and colonial grid of educational institutions made education available to all in principle. Print however, was not limited to the English language. Instead, as Sarkar has argued, vernacular print culture played a crucial role in forging communicational links between a level below that of classical language of high culture but above that of the spoken dialects which was to later prove beneficial to the nationalist project.¹⁹ Print-cultures that emanated from numerous cheaper presses in Calcutta afforded a space to different sections among the Bengali middle classes to carve out their own power bases.²⁰ The most significant among these cheap presses, as Anindita Ghosh has pointed out, were the narrow lanes and by-lanes of the *Battala* area, a part of the ‘Native Town’ in northern Calcutta.²¹ Despite the bhadralok disapproval these small presses did enjoy

¹⁶ Bruce Tiebout Maccully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1940, p. 44.

¹⁷ Bhattacharya, *The Sentinels of Culture*: p. 63.

¹⁸ Sarkar, *Writing Social History*: p. 257.

¹⁹ Sarkar, *Writing Social History*: pp. 174-75.

²⁰ Anindita Ghosh, “Identities made in Print: Literary Bengali and its ‘Others’, c.1800-1905”, in Crispin Bates (ed.), *Beyond Representation: Colonial and Postcolonial Constructions of Indian Identity*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 210-240: 212.

²¹ For a more detailed discussion on the *Battala* press and the literatures, see: Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2006. Also see in Bengali: Gautam Bhadra, *Nera Battalae Jae*

a large and popular readership in lower middle class urban and rural homes.²² This new vernacular field, as Manu Goswami has argued, was both an expression and a vehicle for the making of an ascendant, if internally differentiated, middle class in colonial India.²³

The middle class in colonial Bengal, as it developed during the nineteenth century in Bengal, generally found themselves in a position of ‘in-between-ness’. They were caught in a curious position; while they admiringly faced modernity with all its appeals of liberal reason and progress, they also shared a selective appreciation of their own past – their ancient heritage and culture. The *bhadralok* occupied a position that was in their view forward looking, in terms of material, and in some cases social and cultural progress but they were also highly aware of their past within which they sought to frame their identity. Not discounting the role of English education, Sanjay Joshi has argued that it was the ability of these educated people to configure new social relations that distinguished the middle class from other social groups in colonial India.²⁴ As Kumkum Chatterjee points out, in spite of the ambiguous position that the middle class shared, the role they played in ‘shaping the

kawbar? (How Many Times Does the Sucker Go to Battala?), Kolkata: Chhatim Books, 2011. Translation from the Original Bengali Title is borrowed from Samita Sen, “A Parliament of Women: Dystopia in Nineteenth Century Bengali Imagination”, in Barnita Bagchi (ed.), *The Politics of (Im)Possible: Utopia and Dystopia Reconsidered*, New Delhi: Sage, 2012, p. 124.

²² Ghosh, “Identities made in Print”, p. 214.

²³ Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 168.

²⁴ Joshi, *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India*: p. 8.

dominant discourse about society and politics in the sub-continent during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and beyond,' must be acknowledged.²⁵

The colonial education system, apart from emphasising the importance of English education, also attempted to transform the importance of history and the need for historical representation. History, as used by the colonial authorities, became a tool to accentuate the difference between the superior West and the backward Orient and it therefore served to bolster the 'British self-confidence [while] reminding the Indians of their lowly place in the world's scheme of things.'²⁶ As history became an integral part of colonial discourse and seemed to serve as the legitimate medium to justify colonial dominance, the growing middle class began to probe into history to both search for past glories that would displace the colonial representation of Indian society as backward as well as seek answers to the current subjugation by the British. History therefore attained significance among the western educated Indian middle-class and it became the primary method for them to talk about a collective self.²⁷

5.3 THE REBELLION OF 1857 AND THE CONTEMPORARY RESPONSE OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA

It is against this background that one needs to examine the response of the middle class of Bengal when the rebellion broke out in 1857. This section explores, through

²⁵ Kumkum Chatterjee, "Discovering India: Travel, History and Identity in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century India," in Daud Ali (ed.), *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999: pp. 192-227: p. 192.

²⁶ Sarkar, *Writing Social History*: p. 12.

²⁷ Sarkar, *Writing Social History*: pp. 12-13.

the contemporary newspapers and periodicals of the time, in particular the *Hindoo Patriot* newspaper under the editorship of Hurrish Chandra Mukherji (henceforth referred to as Hurrish Mukherji), the extent to which the middle class literati were able to read the causality and the impact of the rebellion. In addition it also examines the extent to which they questioned the viability of the colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent. However, it needs to be mentioned at the outset that when the rebellion raged in north and central India, the predicament of an Empire in flames and the iron-hand of British repression that followed made it difficult for the Bengal intelligentsia to articulate their voices in overtly antagonistic ways. As elaborated in details in the earlier chapter, Act XV of 1857, derisively known as the ‘Gagging Act’, was passed by the Legislative Council of India in order to regulate the contents and the circulation of the newspapers, books and pamphlets.²⁸ Although this act was implemented throughout, it was the Calcutta press that was most severely affected. As a consequence most of the newspapers and periodicals in and around Calcutta were deprived of their voices of free opinion. Those who still did, for instance *Samachar Shudhabarshan* and the *Friend of India* newspaper, were castigated by the colonial administration as being sympathetic towards the rebel cause and were appropriately dealt with.²⁹ Others such as the *Hindoo Patriot*, as we shall see in the course of this chapter, took recourse to Aesopian languages. As Sabyasachi Bhattacharya has reminded us, ‘our view of the stance adopted by the urban middle classes to the uprising of 1857 remains incomplete chiefly because of this law, which effectively stifled their expression of opinion. Often we do not pay attention to this

²⁸ For further details on Act XV of 1857 see Chapter 2; Also, see Appendix B.

²⁹ For further details see Appendix B: The First Fruits of the Act.

fact when we comment on the attitude of this class.’³⁰ While some of the contemporary newspaper reports and the travel and first-person accounts might appear to be ‘loyalist’ (in the form of condemnation of the sepoys), but a closer re-reading of some of these texts, as has been done in the course of this chapter, would actually reflect a more nuanced understanding of the situation and the response. The aftermath of the rebellion and the cumulative effect of the Black Act of 1836, the ‘Gagging Act’ of 1857, the Vernacular Press Act of 1879, and the Ilbert Bill controversy of 1883 underlined the asymmetry between the rulers and the ruled.³¹ Towards the end of the nineteenth century one can thus notice that such cautions were openly disregarded and admiration for the rebel leaders were volubly

³⁰ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, ed. *Rethinking 1857*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007, p. xxxii.

³¹ The Black Act of 1836: As Law Member of the Council, Thomas Babington Macaulay abolished the special privileges accorded to the British subjects in India regarding their legal appeals and level of court Jurisdiction. The Act placed the Europeans in civil suits on the same level with the Indians before the law. The Europeans opposed this and dubbed it the Black Act. Under intense protest from Europeans the Act was withdrawn much to the chagrin of the native intelligentsia whose belief in England’s liberal modernity encountered a brutal shock. John F. Riddick, *The History of British India: A Chronology*, Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2006, pp. 40-41. Ilbert Bill Controversy 1883-84: The Law Member of the Government of India, C.P. Ilbert, introduced a bill in the Legislative Council, hence the Bill was popularly called the Ilbert Bill. The measure proposed to give various classes of native officials in the colonial administrative service limited criminal jurisdiction over European British subjects living in the mofussil, or country towns in India. A huge controversy was aroused surrounding this bill which continued till a compromise was reached by allowing an European under charges to claim a jury of whom at least half were European British subjects or Americans. Although this compromise preserved the special legal status of European British subjects, the new Act accorded native magistrates criminal jurisdiction over European British subjects. The amended bill was finally passed by the Viceroy’s Legislative Council in 1884. Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995, Revision of thesis (doctoral), p. 33.

expressed.³² And by the end of the century, Calcutta was a city of rebels, loudly questioning the very legitimacy of the British Raj.³³

There is admittedly a grain of truth in the belief that the initial reactions of the Calcutta intelligentsia towards the rebellion were very critical. This is perhaps best reflected through the editorial reports of the *Hindoo Patriot* newspaper. Started in 1853, it was one of the few English language papers of the time that was owned and run by Indians. The powerful English press at that time was dominated by Europeans and Anglo-Indians. In 1830, a few Derozians started the weekly *Parthenon* that closed after two issues.³⁴ In 1831, Prosunna Kumar Tagore published *Reformer*, a weekly that continued until 1833. The appearances of all these short-lived periodicals in rapid succession testify to the desire of the educated Indians to be heard not only

³² Mention may be made in this context the works of Upendra Chandra Mitra and Chandicharan Sen which valorise the heroic efforts of Nana Saheb and the Rani of Jhansi. See Upendra Chandra Mitra, *Nana Saheb Ba Bharater Sukhasapna (Nana Saheb and the Indian Sweet Dream)*, Calcutta: n.a., 1879; Chandicharan Sen, *Jhansir Rani (the Rani of Jhansi)*, Calcutta: n.a., 1888. Also, see Soshee Chunder Dutt's chapter "Shunkur: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny of 1857," in Soshee Chunder Dutt, *Bengaliana: A Dish of Rice and Curry and Other Indigestible Ingredients*, Calcutta: Thacker: Spink, 1885.

³³ Sekhar Bandopadhyay, "From Subjects to Citizens: Reactions to Colonial Rule and the Changing Political Culture of Calcutta in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in Mabel Lee and Michael Wilding (ed.), *History, Literature and Society: Essays in Honour of S.N. Mukherjee*, Sydney Studies, New Delhi: Manohar, 1997: p. 13.

³⁴ 'Derozians' referred to the students, admirers, and followers of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31), a poet, a gifted writer and a charismatic teacher of Hindu College (now Presidency College/University), Calcutta. They were also known as members of the Young Bengal. The members of this group were inspired directly or indirectly by the radical thinking of Derozio. Although they were notorious for their attacks against the orthodox Hindu society, some of them contributed greatly to usher in what is known as the Bengal Renaissance in the nineteenth century. For an overview, see Susobhan Chandra Sarkar, *On the Bengal Renaissance*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 1979, pp. 101-12; Also see "The Complexities of Young Bengal" in Sumit Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial India*, Calcutta, India: Papyrus, 1985, pp. 18-36.

by their own countrymen but also by the British.³⁵ Compared to these earlier periodicals *Hindoo patriot* was a weekly newspaper that used to be published from Calcutta by a group of young English educated men, the most leading of them being Hurrish Mukherji who ran it virtually on his own until his untimely death in 1861.³⁶ Although the editorial columns and the lead articles were mostly anonymous, as was the case with most other newspapers of the time, there was little doubt that those were mostly written by Hurrish Mukherji. The importance of *Hindoo Patriot* newspaper as the authentic voice of Indian opinion can be understood from the fact that even Lord Canning used to anxiously wait for all the issues of the paper and Lord Grenville used to support the policies of Canning in the Parliament after he had apprised himself of the facts through the columns of the paper.³⁷

As a direct product of British colonial rule, Hurrish Mukherji was never in open support of the mutiny/uprising, which he often referred to as ‘rebellion’ or ‘insurrection’ in his articles. In fact, Hurrish Mukherji described ‘rebellion’ as a ‘crime’ to which most societies had extended a measure of ‘leniency’. During the outbreak of Meerut and Delhi, *Hindoo Patriot* remarked that the ‘rebels’ were ‘as brutal and unprincipled a body of ruffians as ever disgraced a uniform or stained the

³⁵ Lord Lytton, the Viceroy (1878-79), made an interesting comment on the Bengali intelligentsia of his time: “the Baboodom of Lower Bengal though disloyal is fortunately cowardly and its only revolver is in its bottle; which though dirty, is not dangerous.” For Hurrish Chunder (Chandra) Mukherji the way to sustainable resistance lay not through the revolver but through the ink bottles. Quoted in Debapriya Paul, “‘Hindoo Patriot’ and Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee: A Study of Colonial Resistance,” *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 37, no. 2, 2004: 161-75, fn 4.

³⁶ Nariaki Nakazato, “Harish Chandra Mukherjee: Profile of a ‘Patriotic’ Journalist in an Age of Social Transition,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 31, no. 2, 2008: 241-70.

³⁷ Ramgopal Sanyal, *Hurrishchandra Mukhopadhyayer Jeevani (Hurrishchandra Mukherji's Biography)*, 2nd. ed., Calcutta: Rama Prakashani, 1887, p. 20.

bright polish of a soldier's sword with the blood of murder'.³⁸ Hurrish Mukherji believed that the 'rebels' would find 'no sympathy from the villagers whom they have plundered, or the higher classes whom they have placed in anxiety, or from any class whose feelings are not utterly inhuman'.³⁹ Straightaway convinced that 'the country is thrown backward by the present disturbances' it recommended the rebels for 'signal chastisement'.⁴⁰ The news of the fall of Delhi and Kanpur, followed by that of the other parts of the north central Gangetic heartland, spread like wildfire in Calcutta, and struck terror in the minds of those whom Kaliprasanna Sinha called in this context the 'unfortunate sheepish Bengalees'.⁴¹ Their interests, as Hurrish Mukherji believed, were not to 'glorify themselves by leading armies to battles or the martyrdom of the forlorn hope. Their pursuits and their triumphs are entirely civil. A strong and versatile intellect enables them to think deeply and think foresightedly'.⁴² They were 'the only class of the fixed population of the country which possesses any

³⁸ "The Sepoy Mutiny and its Action upon the People of Bengal", *Hindoo Patriot*, 4 June 1857 in Benoy Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals of 19th Century Bengal*, vol. 4: 1857, *Hindoo Patriot; Friend of India; Hindu Intelligencer; Bengal Hurkaru*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 1979, p. 80.

³⁹ "The Mutinies," *Hindoo Patriot*, 28 May 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, vol. 4: p. 70.

⁴⁰ "The Sepoy Mutiny and its Action upon the People of Bengal", *Hindoo Patriot*, 4 June 1857 in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, vol. 4: p. 80.

⁴¹ Kaliprasanna Sinha, *The Observant Owl: Hootum's Vignettes of Nineteenth-Century Calcutta: Kaliprasanna Sinha's Hootum Pyanchar Naksha*, trans. Swarup Roy, Ranikhet; New Delhi: Black Kite; Associate and Distributor, Rupa & Co., 2008. Kaliprasanna Sinha (1841-1870), a scion of a leading and wealthy family of Calcutta was educated at Hindu College (presently Presidency College/University). Of his many literary achievements, the two most memorable contributions was the translation of Mahabharata in Bengali language, the other being the one mentioned above. For a more detailed reading of Sinha, see Ranajit Guha, "A Colonial City and Its Times," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, no. 3, 2008: 329-51.

⁴² "The Sepoy Mutiny and its Action upon the People of Bengal", *Hindoo Patriot*, 4 June 1857 in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 80.

active political influence...and in point of intelligence the foremost among their countrymen.’⁴³ Hurrish Mukherji was convinced that the British rule in India was best suited for the intellectual taste of the Bengalis and hoped that when the fitting moment would arrive, this class of people, by lawful and constitutional appeals to the British parliament, would share ‘the honour and responsibility of administering the affairs of the largest and the most well-established empire in Asia’.⁴⁴

It should also be mentioned in this context that one of the most admired and dominant figures in the Calcutta intellectual circle at the time of the rebellion was Iswarchandra Gupta (1812-1859). Widely acclaimed as the ‘father of modern Bengali poetry,’ Gupta owned and published the *Sambad Prabhakar*, a Bengali periodical that later became a daily newspaper. The *Prabhakar* exerted great hold on the bourgeois mind, mirroring and swaying public opinion through its editorials, many of which were penned by Gupta himself.⁴⁵ In April 1857, *Sambad Prabhakar* published a brief dispassionate report on the hanging of a rebel sepoy in Barrackpore. The report dismissed the incident as nothing special and waived away concerns about an impending sepoy revolt as false. The outbreak at Meerut on 10 May 1857 however changed both *Prabhakar*’s and Gupta’s stance. The latter launched a virulent campaign against the mutineers through his poems and editorials. Between May 1857 and September 1858, Gupta published on an average two pieces (one

⁴³ “The Government and the Educated Natives”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 11 June 1857 in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, vol. 4: p. 90.

⁴⁴ Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, vol. 4: p. 90.

⁴⁵ Kalyan Kumar Dasgupta, “History in Bengali Literature (19th-20th Centuries),” in S.P. Sen (ed.), *History in Modern Indian Literature*, Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies, 1975: pp. 28-29. For a more current reading of Iswarchandra Gupta see Milinda Banerjee, *A History of Laughter: Ishwar Gupta and Early Modern Bengal*, Calcutta: Das Gupta, 2009.

poem and one prose commentary) on the rebellion every week. In one of his editorials published in the *Prabhakar* in April 1858 Gupta wrote,

[t]he Sepoy Mutiny has disgraced the name of Bharat. We are entreating the mutineers not to blemish the pure land of Bharat any further and to surrender immediately to the State. It is because of them that Bharat has lost her former glory and famine has befallen the land. Therefore, there is no other way except to ask for pardon of the world-conquering British.⁴⁶

Gupta also appealed to all its readers to pray to God for the victory of the government and the early restoration of peace. The rebel sepoys were criticised as an ungrateful and ill-advised lot who had been fighting a hopeless battle against the mighty British. Gupta's poems in particular lash out at the rebel leaders. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay has pointed out that 'the cacophony of condemnation of the rebels often crossed the limits of civility, as the sepoys were described as dwarfs trying to reach the moon, or as foxes fighting the mighty lion...or as ants who had developed wings to face an imminent death.'⁴⁷ Calling them misdirected bigots and pretentious usurpers, Iswarchandra Gupta 'prayed' for their quick death at the hands of the British forces. Both Nana Sahib and Lakshmi Bai were picked out as special subjects by Gupta for his most scathing critiques and caustic satires. Nana is variously dehumanised and consistently referred to as the 'adopted ass' (pushyi ere) and a 'rogue sheep' (doshyi bhere). The queen of Jhansi is called a 'shameless whore' (magi); an 'unwomanly woman' overstepping the domestic bounds and making a

⁴⁶ Indira Chowdhury, *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 23.

⁴⁷ Bandyopadhyay, "From Subjects to Citizens," p. 21.

fool of herself. In his poem 'Kanpur Bijoy' (The Conquest of Kanpur), Gupta even made stark insinuations about Nana and Lakshmi Bai's relationship.⁴⁸

This kind of criticism towards the 'rebels' on one hand and the apparent show of allegiance towards the colonial government on the other were also reflected in varying ways during the rebellion. In May 1857, in a meeting convened at the Hindu Metropolitan College, attended by Radhakanta Deb and many other notables, expressed their disgust and horror at the mutiny and recorded the sense of relief for the fact that no sympathy was shown by any 'reputable or influential classes' towards the outbreak.⁴⁹ The meeting also resolved to show unflinching loyalty towards the British and assured them of all possible help for suppressing the sepoys who had risen in rebellion against their masters and disturbed the peace of the empire. In fact, when in December 1857 the colonial army won a signal success against the rebels, Radhakanta Deb along with 2500 others congratulated the Governor-General and organised a grand banquet in 1858 to celebrate the victory.⁵⁰ Likewise, the British

⁴⁸ Sukumar Mitra, *1857 O Bangladesh (1857 and Bengal)*, Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1960, pp. 2-4.

⁴⁹ Radhakanta Deb (1783-1867) was an orthodox Hindu socio-religious leader of the early nineteenth century. He belonged to the royal family of Sova Bazar in Calcutta. He had received his early education from Calcutta Academy and in the process learnt Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. Deb was associated with the elite of the nineteenth century Bengal of his time. He was actively associated with many socio-cultural organizations and educational institutions. He had also been the director of the Hindu College and founded Hindu Charitable Institution in 1846. Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay and Debedranath Tagore, the two socio-literary giants of the time, extended their generous support and along with the cooperation of Matilal Seal and Rajendralal Dutta, Deb founded the Metropolitan College, the first national college in Calcutta. Deb was the President and Debedranath Tagore was the secretary of the college. See Amaresh Datta, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, Calcutta: Sahitya Akademi, 1987, p. 916.

⁵⁰ For further details see Sambhu Chandra Mukherjee, *The Mutinies and the People or Statements of Native Fidelity Exhibited During the Outbreak of 1857-58*, Calcutta: Stanhope Press, 1859, pp. 125-33.

Indian Association, the public body of both the upper and middle class passed resolutions decrying the rebellion. Demonstrations such as the one mentioned above were organised by others all across Calcutta to show the sympathy of the Calcutta intelligentsia towards the colonial government in that moment of crisis.⁵¹ Similar instances of individual cases of apathy towards the futility of the rebellion and support to the government was to be found. Mention may be made in this context of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay who was then a student of Law in Calcutta. He expressed his feelings before his barrister Professor Montrieu that if for a day even the end of the British rule had appeared possible, he would have returned to his native place after throwing away his law books in the Ganges.⁵² As Sumanta Banerjee has pointed out, the popular songs in Calcutta also appeared to be favourably disposed towards the Scottish Highlander troops who arrived in Calcutta on their way to suppress the rebellion.⁵³

5.4 THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

While the Calcutta intelligentsia were filling up columns of their newspapers with essays condemning the atrocities of the rebels and displaying their apparent faithfulness towards the colonial government during the rebellion, this was not

⁵¹ For similar such instances of demonstrations see “Loyal Demonstrations”, *Hindoo Patriot*, 28 May 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: pp. 70-72.

⁵² Quoted in Asoka Kumar Sen, *The Popular Uprising and the Intelligentsia: Bengal between 1855-1873*, Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1992, p. 34.

⁵³ Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989, p. 145. Banerjee interestingly pointed to the fact that the Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, among other popular leaders of the rebellion, was a common figure with the Kalighat *pat* painters during that time. In several pictures she appeared as a courageous woman on horseback.

without dilemma. Behind this display of loyalism there was also a growing sense of ignominy involved in their state of subordination. Although critical of the rebellion Hurrish Mukherji in one of the editorials pointed out the reasons behind this bloody insurrection. He believed that it was ‘neither the fat of oxen nor the fear of proselytism, but a deep-rooted cause of estrangement’ that led to these mutinous outbreaks.⁵⁴ In fact he was convinced that the composition and character of the Indian army had a discipline peculiarly of its own. Unlike Europe, where ‘the very dregs of the population only are enlisted into the ranks’, the men who constituted the armed strength of the British Indian empire, sprung from a race that was ‘endowed with a traditional repute of chivalry’.⁵⁵ The strictest rules were enforced in order to prevent the admission of recruits from inferior castes. To Hurrish Mukherji nothing short of grievous oppression or ‘the most flagrant disrespect of substantial prejudices’ could have driven the native soldiery to conduct an act that was foreign to their obligations and their duty: ‘Without the utmost provocations to insubordination the sepoy scarcely ever raises his hand against his superior. It is not in his constitution to do so. The precepts of his religion forbid his perpetrating such a deed.’⁵⁶

While analysing the causes of disaffection among the army, *Hindoo Patriot*, Hurrish Mukherji doubted that the sepoys were the only ones to be adversely affected by the establishment of colonial rule in India. He averred that it would be very

⁵⁴ “The Mutinies,” *Hindoo Patriot*, 2 April 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: pp. 19-22.

⁵⁵ “The Mutinies,” *Hindoo Patriot*, 2 April 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 20.

⁵⁶ “The Mutinies,” *Hindoo Patriot*, 2 April 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 20.

difficult to find out one single individual among the countrymen who did not hate Englishmen at least inwardly and the 'same set of causes disaffected both sepoys and civil population'.⁵⁷ He lamented the fact that Britain's dominion over India was upheld by the sword and was supported by the majority of the British politicians.⁵⁸ In the editorial he criticised the foreign domination while glorifying the rebels at the same time in an unequivocal language:

How slight is the hold the British Government has acquired upon the affections of its Indian subjects has been made painfully evident by the events of the last few weeks... It is no longer a mutiny, but a rebellion. Perhaps, it will be said that all mutinies, when they attain a certain measure of success, rise to the dignity of a rebellion. But the recent mutinies of the Bengal army have one peculiar feature – they have from the very beginning drawn the sympathy of the country... [The sepoys] have rebelled against the authority which they have sworn to obey... They have hazarded all their most valuable interest; and their countrymen view them as martyrs to a holy cause and a great national cause... The mutineers have been joined and aided by the civil population... there is not a single native of India who does not feel the full weight of the grievances imposed upon him by the very existence of the British rule in India... grievances inseparable from subjection to a foreign rule. There is not one among the educated classes who does not feel his prospects circumscribed and his ambition restricted by the supremacy of that power.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ "Army Reform," *Hindoo Patriot*, 30 April 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: pp. 46-50.

⁵⁸ "The Country and the Government," *Hindoo Patriot*, 28 May 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: p. 63.

⁵⁹ "The Country and the Government," *Hindoo Patriot*, 28 May 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: pp. 63-64.

As Nakazato has noted, the euphemism Hurrish Mukherji used barely served as a cover for his sympathy with the sepoys. He considered the Mutiny legitimate in that it had the Mughal emperor's approval as well as popular support – thus a 'rebellion'.⁶⁰ However, towards the conclusion of the same editorial, he took a more cautious approach. He stressed that the disaffection he had noted did not 'neutralise the mass of the Indian population the feeling of loyalty' who were benefitted by the establishment of the colonial rule in India.⁶¹ To him, the assertion of his verdict on colonial rule was by no means negative, despite its clear limitations. Hurrish Mukherji wrote:

We believe the prevailing feeling is that any great disaster befalling the British rule would be a disastrous check to national prosperity. We do not deny, that [there is] a pettish desire to see the high handed proceedings of its officials rebuked and the insolence... of the Anglo-Indian community checked... But, on the whole, the country is sound. The sympathy which the mutineers have found from the people extends no further than to a wish to see the British government humiliated to a certain extent. The Zemindars of the Meerut district have given shelter to the Europeans who were driven from Delhi by the violence of the mutineers, and undertaken the security of the dawk (post). The feeling which prompted that act was one of the genuine loyalty. The Government of British India rules over a people who have found the first elements of civil order under its auspices. It has strength in the strength of civilisation, in the loftiness of its purposes...

⁶⁰ Nakazato, "Harish Chandra Mukherjee," p. 259.

⁶¹ "The Country and the Government," *Hindoo Patriot*, 28 May 1857, Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: pp. 66-67.

which will carry it through many such dangers as that now threatening it.⁶²

In such a mix of sentiments, Hurrish Mukherji thus represented the complex responses of the Calcutta intelligentsia. While he clearly pointed out that the grievances of the sepoys were shared by the civil population of the country, he equally stressed that the population in general was motivated by a desire to ‘humiliate’ rather than to overthrow the colonial government altogether. He perceived and argued that the insurrection required changes and alterations within the colonial administrative policies and structures. He underlined aspects of loyalism that clearly indicated that he was not alone in his interpretation. His final verdict was clear and forthright even if it was expressed within a framework that had not been innocent of criticism.

The other major reason behind the rebellion, as conveyed by the writings in *Hindoo Patriot*, was the systematic exclusion of Indians from official employment of a superior character. The periodical drew attention to the invidious distinction created by the colonial government between the two nations, one of whom monopolised all the honours and emoluments because they belonged to the race of conquerors while the other were debarred from even sharing in those since they were the conquered lot.⁶³ Hurrish Mukherji was amongst those who regarded the exclusion of Indians from all the places of trust and distinction which they previously held to

⁶² “The Country and the Government,” *Hindoo Patriot*, 28 May 1857, Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: pp. 66-67.

⁶³ “Army Reform,” *Hindoo Patriot*, 30 April 1857, in *ibid.*, pp. 46-50.

be another reason behind this insurrection.⁶⁴ However, to him, the feeling of a deep discontent generated by the tempering with the landed rights in northern India was singlehandedly responsible in transforming the mutiny of sepoys to an 'Indian rebellion'. He wrote, 'if there be any one sentiment powerful in the Indian mind over all others, it is the sentiment of affection with which the native views the soil he inherits, the homestead he dwells in, the relation which subsist between him and his landlord or his tenant. A rude shock was given to this sentiment.'⁶⁵ As a result, the 'cause of order' received a fatal blow in the land relation of the North-Western Provinces of India. The most 'warlike portion' of the population, the most influential leaders, were injured in their most sensitive parts. The sepoys, he wrote, thus began to fear not only for their caste and their pay, but likewise, their lands. And when the mutiny made a certain measure of progress, the deposed aristocracy put themselves at the head of the movement, which turned the sepoy outbursts into a full scale 'rebellion'.⁶⁶ It is important to note in this context that Hurrish Mukherji, writing at the time of the uprising, was well acquainted with the real grievances that led to the conflagration, long before Stokes and others made their intervention with this vital point.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ "The Mission of the Mutinies," *Hindoo Patriot*, 18 November 1858, in Benoy Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals of 19th Century Bengal*, vol. 5: 1858-60, *Hindoo Patriot; Friend of India*, Calcutta: Papyrus, 1980, p. 98.

⁶⁵ "The Causes of the Mutinies," *Hindoo Patriot*, 27 May 1858, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: pp. 46-49.

⁶⁶ "The Causes of the Mutinies," *Hindoo Patriot*, 27 May 1858, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: p. 49.

⁶⁷ See Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978; Eric Stokes and C. A. Bayly, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*.

There cannot be a more accurate description of the agony and despair of the colonised. Hurrish Mukherji probably never wished the rebels any success in reverting the country back to the days of misrule of the late Mughal Empire. He was aware that the forces united in this apparent anti-colonial struggle were not the harbinger of a new era, but were prompted by their narrow territorial interests and the unity amongst them were too fragile to be trusted. But at the same time, he was critical enough of colonial rule in India. To him, the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised was not that of a master and a slave but a relationship based on 'reciprocal obligation'. He pointed out the fact that 'between the Government and the people, therefore the bond is one of reciprocal obligation. You rescued us from an odious tyranny. We assisted you in the gaining of a kingdom with our means. We owe you a cheerful allegiance. You owe us all that a good Government ought to do for its subjects.'⁶⁸

Hurrish Mukherji was desperately trying to develop a responsible political agency for initiating a culture of sustainable resistance that would not be contained or suppressed by the coercive power of the colonial government. The rebellion of 1857 provided him with the opportunity whereby he could vent out his critical stance towards colonial rule. He believed that 'the recent evils of the country were brought on by the systematic ignoring by Indian officials of the civilisation of the people.'⁶⁹ To him, European scholars had long acknowledged and lauded the 'high refinement of the Hindoo mind' and the colonial government should be cautious of the fact that

⁶⁸ "The Ingratitude of the Natives of India," *Hindoo Patriot*, 9 December, 1858, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: p. 102.

⁶⁹ "The Mission of the Mutinies," *Hindoo Patriot*, 18 November 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: p. 100.

‘in their future intercourse with the legislation for the Natives, they may never forget that they have a civilised people to deal with.’⁷⁰

As the rebellion gradually came to a close and the events less intense, the sense of disillusionment with foreign rule among the Calcutta intelligentsia became more intensified. Sekhar Bandopadhyay has pointed out that ‘this growing alienation was largely due to the unabashed display of racism that reflected the classical colonial dilemma of the colonisers professing certain principles which they themselves were unable to practice in order to maintain their monopoly of power.’⁷¹ As a response therefore in different literary works such as novels, newspapers, travelogues, a redefinition of identity began to be reflected through expressions of discontent, dissatisfaction, veiled criticisms of alien rule, dreams about progress and the gradual unfolding of the idea of India as a nation.

In one of the lead articles in the *Hindoo Patriot*, while trying to find an answer to the key question as to why the British Empire that ‘has been plying her mission apparently with every success for a century’ had to face such a catastrophe in the form of the uprising, Hurrish Mukherji sarcastically remarked that ‘there must have been something rotten at [its] core.’⁷² To people like him, the English East India Company’s rule over India, in spite of its many shortcomings, was by far ‘the best intentioned and most beneficent government’ in the recent past. Under their patronage railway transportation was made possible across the vast and hitherto impassable lands and forests of India. The electric telegraph and better quality roads

⁷⁰ “The Mission of the Mutinies,” *Hindoo Patriot*, 18 November 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: p. 100.

⁷¹ Bandopadhyay, “From Subjects to Citizens,” p. 25.

⁷² “The Mission of the Mutinies,” *Hindoo Patriot*, 18 November 1858, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: p. 98.

were traversed through the length and breadth of the land. In other words, as Hurrish Mukherji puts it, 'all the material paraphernalia of European civilisation have been transported to India in the whole masses.'⁷³ If these were true, then why and how did this 'phenomenon' happen? The answer to this question, according to Hurrish Mukherji, was to be found in the fact that,

India has a civilisation of her own, and that in the matter of that article she thinks she can afford to be independent of the charity of all the nations of the globe. She possessed laws and social organisation in some respects all but perfect at a time when Great Britain was the mere den of painted savages.⁷⁴

India possessed an ancient tradition and idealism which preceded even the Greeks. British rule in India assumed almost from the very beginning that theirs was a civilisation better than the one they had come in contact with; and they proceeded on the maxim that 'the better civilisation must swallow up the worse one'.⁷⁵ As a consequence, therefore, they not only began to 'experimentalise upon organisms millenniums old' but also repudiated the opinion of the Indians and sought to promote only their own interests. 'A nation with such a long and glorious past as the people of India would not brook such ignoring of their antecedents...and the result came to be felt.'⁷⁶ Hurrish Mukherji in this way also justified the resentment as was expressed in the rebellion of 1857: 'was it possible that the humiliation and the injury

⁷³ "The Mission of the Mutinies," *Hindoo Patriot*, 18 November 1858, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: pp. 98-99.

⁷⁴ "The Mission of the Mutinies," *Hindoo Patriot*, 18 November 1858, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: p. 99.

⁷⁵ "Government by Native Opinion," *Hindoo Patriot*, 6 January 1859, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: p. 109.

⁷⁶ "Government by Native Opinion," *Hindoo Patriot*, 6 January 1859, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: p. 109.

could not be felt, and when felt in their fullness, resented? The people of India refused their sanction to obedience to theories.’⁷⁷

The rebellion of 1857 also ushered in a growing sense of awareness amongst the Calcutta intelligentsia regarding the question of Indian self-determination. At the time of the transfer of power from the Company rule to the Crown, Hurrish Mukherji wrote,

Can a revolution in the Indian Government be authorised by Parliament without consulting the wishes of the vast millions of men for whose benefit it is imposed to be made? The reply must be in negative ... The time is nearly come when all Indian questions must be solved by Indians. The mutinies have made patent to the English public what must be the effects of politics in which the Native is allowed no voice.⁷⁸

He further articulated, ‘so long as the English rule means civil and political degradation, as it undoubtedly doth now the proclamations professing the extermination of all the tribes of English Kaffirs, would be framed and promulgated by the Hindoos and Rajput.’⁷⁹ English statesmanship might have secured the property, increased the accumulation of wealth, multiplied their comforts, but to Hurrish Mukherji, ‘a man doth not live by bread alone’.⁸⁰ He categorically stated that ‘cordiality in the true sense of the word cannot subsist between a conquering and

⁷⁷ “Government by Native Opinion,” *Hindoo Patriot*, 6 January 1859, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: pp. 109-10.

⁷⁸ Quoted from Nemai Sadhan Bose, *Indian Awakening and Bengal*, 3rd revised and enlarged ed., Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1976, pp. 164-65.

⁷⁹ Gouranga Gopal Sengupta, *Hurishchandra Mukhopadhyay O Hindoo Patriot (Hurishchandra Mukhopadhyay and Hindoo Patriot)*, Calcutta: Paschimbanga Bangla Akademi, 2003, pp. 36-38.

⁸⁰ Sen, *The Popular Uprising and the Intelligentsia: Bengal between 1855-1873*: p. 48.

conquered race so long as the former by their narrow minded actions keep fast the recollection of national degradation in the minds of the latter'.⁸¹

Similar voices of concerns were also raised by other contemporary newspapers such as the *Hindoo Intelligencer*, edited by Kasi Prasad Ghosh, as a result of which the newspaper was temporarily suspended under the Press Act of 1857. In one editorial dated 6 April 1857, *Intelligencer* in a scathing criticism put forward a series of questions to the British citizens and their representatives in the House of Commons regarding the responsibility of the colonial government towards India:

Are not those who are compelled to raise so large a portion of revenues of this country, and upon whom the burden often falls with a weight too heavy to be borne, entitled to the protection of the Government to which that revenue goes? Does not the obligation to pay a tax on the one side involve the duty of extending protection on the other? Is not the protection of the people, and equal and impartial administration of the law, among the primary purposes for which taxes are ostensibly levied? May not the people say that in spending money for our protection, and the due administration of Justice, you do but give us back a small share of that which is our own? Why then deny to us that which is so dear to you – protection in our homes, the enjoyment of the pittance our industry commands, and deliverance from the illegal insults, extortions and brutalities to which we are now subjected.⁸²

⁸¹ Sen, *The Popular Uprising and the Intelligentsia: Bengal between 1855-1873*: p. 48.

⁸² "The Condition of Bengal," *Hindu Intelligencer*, 6 April 1857, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 4: pp. 262-66.

The editorial eventually concluded that if in the future the authorities did not address the grievances the only logical course would be to take up arms as the sepoys had done.

It is therefore evident from the above discussion that the Calcutta intelligentsia during the rebellion of 1857 took a stance which was much more complex than the simplistic categorisation of terms like ‘loyalists’ or ‘rebels’. Clearly they were condemning the rebel sepoys’ acts of brutality in the Gangetic heartland of India which led to the massacre of innocent Europeans and natives alike, plundering the treasuries and looting houses of many innocent who found themselves caught in the crossfire of the rebellion. To the bhadralok of Bengal, these were ominous signs that there was a clear hindrance to the development of a modern enlightened society. However they were also quick to point out the real causes behind the bloody insurrection that, in their opinion, was the direct outcome of the repressive and unjust colonial domination.

5.5 THE INTELLIGENTSIA AND THE CRITIQUE OF ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCE OF BRITISH RULE

The rebellion of 1857 had also opened up before the Calcutta intelligentsia another aspect of the colonial rule in India. As the idea of an Empire based on the virtues of eighteenth century rationalism and nineteenth century liberalism and inter-racial collaboration, visualised by Dwarkanath Tagore and his generation, slowly began to fade out amongst the Calcutta intelligentsia, the reality of an exploitative character of

the colonial economy unfolded itself.⁸³ This growing awareness of the economic ruin as a result of the colonial rule was reflected even in 1840s, and by contrast the preceding Muslim rule, which was otherwise had been a subject of general condemnation, began to receive admiration. The assessment of the economic impact of colonial rule in fact has a longer genealogy that predates twentieth century professional historiography. The subject of the adverse economic effects of colonial rule on India was an important issue with the early Indian nationalists associated with the Indian National Congress and with M.K. Gandhi's critique of British rule over India as well. The first generation of Indian nationalists such as Dadabhai Naoroji developed a comprehensive critique of British economic policies in India and suggested that colonial economic exploitation had produced a massive drain of wealth from the sub-continent.⁸⁴ Romesh Chunder Dutt's works on the same subject carried forward the critiques formulated by Naoroji and others.⁸⁵

⁸³ Dwarkanath Tagore (1794-1846), founder of Bengal's most illustrious family, was the leading entrepreneur of eastern India in the first half of the nineteenth century. He and his British partners dominated the business world of Calcutta in the 1830s and 1840s and pioneered the introduction of steam engine technology and modern corporate form to India. Tagore viewed his entrepreneurial activities as part of a larger design: the building, through local inter-racial corporation, of a modern industrialized India that would eventually take its place as an equal member of a British Commonwealth of nations. He used his wealth and influence to advance inter-racial social and cultural institutions in Calcutta and often acted as a self-appointed Indian representative to the court of Queen Victoria. For further details see Blair B. Kling, *Partner in Empire: Dwarkanath Tagore and the Age of Enterprise in Eastern India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

⁸⁴ For more details see Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, 1st Indian ed., Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1962 [1901].

⁸⁵ Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule, from the Rise of the British Power in 1757 to the Accession of Queen Victoria in 1837*, 7th ed., Trubner's Oriental Series, London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1950; Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age, from the Accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 to the Commencement of the Twentieth Century*, 7th ed., Trubner's Oriental Series, London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1950.

As I argue here in this section, this critique of the economic impact of the colonial rule was touched upon by a large section of the middle class intelligentsia in Bengal from the 1840s onwards. In a way, as Tithi Bhattacharya has noted, their critique of the political economy of colonialism was not only exhaustive but genuinely revolutionary in its anti-imperialist content.⁸⁶ Mention may be made of the English language daily *Jnanannesan* which wrote that ‘previously under the Muslim rule the people of this country had the freedom to engage in any business or to do anything they liked for a living. But now, having lost this freedom of choice, they had been reduced to a group of clerks and agents.’⁸⁷ Similarly, around the same time, the *Bengal Spectator*, a monthly journal edited by Peary Chand Mitra, wrote eloquently of this exploitative character of the colonial economy as a result of the colonial expansion.⁸⁸ In one of the articles published on 15 October 1842, the

⁸⁶ Bhattacharya, *The Sentinels of Culture*: p. 225.

⁸⁷ Bandyopadhyay, “From Subjects to Citizens,” p. 24. *Jnanannesan* was first published in Bengali in the year 1831 under the guidance of Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee. However, after two years, in 1833, it started publishing in English language. The editors of the newspaper included Rasikkrishna Mullick, Madhav Chandra Mullick and Gourishankar Tarkabagish. The periodical continued till 1842 when it was finally closed. *Jnanannesan* was considered to be one of the mouthpieces of the Derozians and dealt with various socio-political and economic issues of the time, including slavery and the condition of the peasants under the zamindars.

⁸⁸ The *Bengal Spectator* was a monthly journal, set up by Ram Gopal Ghosh who initially edited the journal with Peary Chand Mitra. It was first published in April 1842. Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee was later on associated for some time with its editorial management. Its principal aims and objectives were advancement of knowledge and to lay before the Government the wants and grievances of the ‘native’ community and pray for those advantages to which they may be deemed entitled. One of the chief items advocated by the *Bengal Spectator* was widow remarriage. It opined that women were at liberty to marry again if their husbands were not heard of or if they were dead, retired from the worlds, proved to be eunuchs or became veritable outcasts. The *Spectator* criticised the administrative monopoly enjoyed by friends and relatives of British administrators through the evil system of patronage. It was thought to be one of the causes of

Spectator pointed out that the amount of revenue assessed under the decennial settlement had been four times greater than that which prevailed under Muslim rule, the Permanent settlement being even more oppressive.⁸⁹ Voices of dissent were also being raised by other newspapers of the time, most notably, *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, which stated that the ‘outward glitter of the development that dazzled the eyes of many in British Bengal only concealed the boundless sufferings of the people.’⁹⁰ It also pointed out that when every family in every village had been in distress, and the cause of the distress was evidently because of the continuous exploitation of the foreigners, under such condition, ‘only a deaf and blind person could call Bengal fully developed!’ However, perhaps in a more self-rebuking tone the journal admitted the fact that, ‘We are under foreign rule, we are being educated in a foreign language and we are tolerating a foreign tyranny.’⁹¹ Likewise, *Hindoo Patriot* also

growing impoverishment of the country and urged the Court of Directors to thoroughly revamp the system.

⁸⁹ Narahari Kabiraj, “Bengal Spectator O Adhunik Chinta (Bengal Spectator and Modern Thought),” in Narahari Kaviraj (ed.), *Unish Sataker Banglar Jagaran: Tarka O Bitarka (the Awakening in Nineteenth Century Bengal: The Debates)*, Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1984: pp. 41-42.

⁹⁰ *Tattvabodhini Patrika* was the organ of Tattvabodhini Sabha of the Brahmo Samaj. The journal was first published on 16 August 1843 from Calcutta to propagate the Brahmo faith and to enable regular contact among members of Tattvabodhini Sabha. Akshay Kumar Dutta was its editor, and Debendranath Tagore was charged with its overall supervision. The best-known prose writers of the 19th century Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Rajnarayan Basu, Dwijendranath Tagore contributed regularly to the journal, spawning a new epoch in Bengali literature. All its contributors and patrons were reformists. Although propagation of religious matters was its primary objective, the journal also published articles on general knowledge and science, history, literature, religions, politics, economics, sociology and philosophy. It used to print pieces urging Bengalis to venture out into international trade and equip themselves adequately for political independence. In this way the journal made significant contributions towards developing Bengali culture and civilization.

⁹¹ Narahari Kaviraj, “Tattvabodhini Patrikar Bhumika (The Role of Tattvabodhini Patrika),” in Narahari Kaviraj (ed.), *Unish Sataker Banglar Jagaran: Tarka O Bitarka (The Awakening in Nineteenth Century Bengal: The Debates)*, Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1984: p. 61.

touched upon the issue of the increasing burden of income tax on the subjects of British India. The rebellion provided this realisation with a new impetus. As mentioned earlier, Hurrish Mukherji raised the issue of the burden of tax to be one of the primary reasons behind the rebellion. He wrote:

The tempering with landed rights universally over the face of Northern India had generated a feeling of deep discontent. If there be any one sentiment powerful in the Indian mind over all others, it is the sentiment of affection with which the native views the soil he inherits, the homestead he dwells in, the relations which subsist between him and his landlord or his tenant.⁹²

According to Hurrish Mukherji, throughout the northern India the land settlement pattern of the colonial government had systematically dispossessed the landed aristocracies while the nature of land revenue collection made the condition of the peasants agonising. As a result, during the rebellion the sepoys and aristocracies were bound together by a common fear of the loss of land.⁹³ Hurrish Mukherji also criticised the economic policy that the colonial government undertook and lamented over the fact that the only equality that the administration managed to create as a result was equality in poverty. The whole task of reconstructing the society was given to the young revenue agents of the government who had very little knowledge of the matters they came to deal with.⁹⁴

⁹² "The Causes of the Mutinies," *Hindoo Patriot*, 27 May 1858, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: p. 49.

⁹³ "The Causes of the Mutinies," *Hindoo Patriot*, 27 May 1858, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: pp. 49-50.

⁹⁴ "The Causes of the Mutinies," *Hindoo Patriot*, 27 May 1858, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: pp. 49-50.

A detailed analysis of the economic consequences of colonial rule and the discontents it generated received a detailed and thorough treatment in *Travels of a Hindoo to various parts of Bengal and Upper India* written by Bholanauth Chunder (alternative spelling 'Bholanath Chandra'; 1822-1910).⁹⁵ Although written as a travelogue, the narrative provides a detailed discussion on the economic system instituted by the colonial rulers and how it shaped not only the colonial subjects' economic position but also their views towards the foreign rule. Chunder's preoccupation with the condition of the Indian economy and his strong views on British colonial policy in its impoverishment and degradation are reminiscent of the views of Naoroji and R.C. Dutt. What is particularly significant about Chunder's economic critique is that it predates the better known views of Naoroji and Dutt. It therefore allows a glimpse into the economic views of a socially and politically conscious, 'modern', Indian/Bengali literati of the 1857 era and perhaps permits a longer term view of criticisms which were articulated later under the aegis of the Indian National Congress. Chunder's attention to the economic dimension of colonialism also assumes reinforced weight in light of the recent trend in South Asian historiography of highlighting the cultural complexities of the colonial encounter. It reminds us of the significance and urgency of economic issues in the perception of an intelligent, 'nationalist' minded protagonist such as Chunder and also throws some light on what was perhaps an incipient stage in the emergence of mainstream, colonial Indian middle class perceptions of India and Indian-ness.

Bholanauth Chunder's own background in terms of his education, social status and education fits into the general attributes of the Bengali bhadralok of the

⁹⁵ Bholanauth Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India. Volume One*, London: N. Trubner, 1869.

nineteenth century. Bholanauth Chunder was born in Calcutta to a fairly prosperous Hindu family of Subarnabanik caste.⁹⁶ His grandfather Ramdulal had made and lost a fortune through his association with a mercantile firm. His maternal-grandfather was the Diwan of the English Residency of Dhaka.⁹⁷ In 1830 Chunder joined the Oriental Seminary and in 1832 he was enrolled at the Hindu College where he remained until 1842.⁹⁸ At Hindu College, Chunder was recognised for his scholastic abilities and was awarded several prizes for his aptitude in history and literature. In literature he greatly admired the works of William Shakespeare and Walter Scott. Chunder attributed his literary career to D.L. Richardson. It is possible that during his time in Hindu College, Chunder became familiar with 'Young Bengal' and choose to describe himself as one. Following his sojourn at Hindu College, Chunder worked in the Union Bank but soon resigned to start a mercantile firm under the name of Mahesh Chandra and Co. He also became an agent for Howarth Hardman & Co., which owned a sugar mill. As an agent of the firm, Chunder travelled through much of East Bengal. Due to various reasons the company had to close down bringing such an immense loss to Chunder that he declared himself bankrupt. It was his failure in business that brought him into the literary world. He began by contributing a travelogue to the English newspaper daily *The Englishman*, which was based on his

⁹⁶ Subarnabanik is a Hindu sub-caste within the Banias or the occupational/merchant communities in India. The members of Subarnabanik or Sunar caste usually deal with silver, gold or in banking business. See: S. N. Mukherjee, "Daladali in Calcutta in the Nineteenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies*, 9, no. 01, 1975: 59-80, p. 69.

⁹⁷ Bijit Kumar Dutta, "Bholanath Chandra (1822-1910)," in Siba Pada Sen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies, 1972-74: pp. 263-64. Most of Bholanauth Chunder's biographical information draws upon this biographical entry.

⁹⁸ Bimanbehari Majumdar, *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas: From Rammohan to Dayananda*, Calcutta: Bookland Private Limited, 1967, p. 111.

frequent trips to Dacca. Chunder travelled widely to parts of north India on various occasions and he kept a record of his travels.

Bholanauth Chunder's travel account was published in 1869 and contains his observations during several trips, made between 1845 and 1866, from Calcutta to parts of North India, more specifically to Delhi, through Gangetic Northern India. Contemporary scholarship has given a great deal of importance to observations and perceptions of European travellers to India both during the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries as well as during the period of colonial rule over India. Memoirs, reminiscences, and dairies of British men and women associated directly or indirectly with the colonial regime have also received a fair share of attention.⁹⁹ However, we know very little about travel narratives of Indians about India during the period when colonial government had introduced significant changes in India's society, economy and culture. The Indian middle class of the nineteenth century – represented here by Bholanauth Chunder, the author of this travel account – was in large part a creation of the colonial episode in Indian history. Thus a travel narrative which contains the views of an Indian about India is significant in itself.

⁹⁹ For further details see: Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. ed., London: Routledge, 2008; Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India, 1600-1800*, Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; Ketaki Kushari Dyson, *A Various Universe: A Study of the Journals and Memoirs of British Men and Women in the Indian Subcontinent, 1765-1856*, Reprint ed., New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. In recent years however, there has been a growing trend towards writing the history of travel accounts by the Indians in Europe and elsewhere. See Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows of Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain: 1600-1857*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004; Simonti Sen, *Travels to Europe: Self and Other in Bengali Travel Narratives, 1870-1910*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2005; Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Bimanbehari Majumdar has attributed to Bholanauth Chunder the ‘fatherhood of the Swadeshi movement’ if understood purely for its economic significance.¹⁰⁰ Majumdar primarily looked at a series of articles published by Chunder between 1873 and 1876 in the *Mookerjee’s Magazine*. Chunder’s Swadeshi sentiments are expressed in no uncertain terms when he wrote: ‘I want no foreign capital to resort to India; her own capital should be created. I want no foreign imports which she can manufacture herself at home.’¹⁰¹ Traces of his sense of economic nationalism and his Swadeshi sentiments are evident very early on in his travelogue, which spans two decades from mid-1840s to mid-1860s. Chunder continually interspersed his travel narrative with a lament for the ‘passing off of the manufactures of our country into foreign hands’ and hoped:

Our sons and grandsons will emulate our ancestors to have every *dhooty*, every shirt, and every *pugree* made from the fabrics of Indian cotton manufactured by Indian mill-owners.¹⁰² The present Hindoo is a mere tiller of the soil...but the increased knowledge, energy, and wealth of the Indian of the twentieth or twenty-first century, would enable them to follow both agriculture and manufactures, to develop the subterranean resources, to open mines and set up mills, to launch

¹⁰⁰ Majumdar, *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas*: p. 111.

¹⁰¹ Bholanauth Chunder, *Mookerjee’s Magazine*, 1873, p. 235, cited in *ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁰² ‘*Dhooty*,’ also spelt *dhoty* or *dhotie*, refer to the loin-cloth worn by all the ‘respectable Hindu castes of Upper India’, wrapped around the lower part of the body, the end being then passed between the legs and tucked in at the waist, so that ‘a festoon of calico’ hangs down to either knee. Source: Sir Henry Yule, A. C. Burnell, and William Crooke, *Hobson-Jobson: Being a Glossary of Anglo-Indian Colloquial Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms; Etymological, Historical, Geographical, and Discursive*, London: John Murray, 1886, p. 314.; ‘*Pugree*,’ a term often used in colloquial for a scarf of cotton or silk wound round the hat in turban-form, to protect the head from the sun. *Ibid.*, p. 735.

ships upon the ocean, and carry goods to the doors of the consumers in England and America.¹⁰³

Chunder's advocacy of Swadeshi was later to become an important economic plank of popular nationalism in India – both in 1905 and later in the Gandhian movement. He believed that it was through the growth of domestic industries and a strong domestic market that the Indian economy would grow. His vision for the future of the Indian economy was similar to his perception of contemporary English economy with its strong domestic economy and an equally robust export trade. Therefore his Swadeshi sentiments were strongly associated with his advocacy for the development of modern industries in India. He was critical of British trade policies that have actively de-industrialised India and has made the 'colonial economy' go into debt.

Similar to the view of Hurrish Mukherji expressed in *Hindoo Patriot*, Chunder also believed that the rising income tax was the main reason behind the rebellion of 1857. To him, 'never before was national debt known in India... not more is the national debt foreign to the ideas of the North-Westerns than is the Income Tax.'¹⁰⁴ Much of the 'national' debt that Chunder had referred to was the result of the changing trade relations between India and Britain which, to him, had brought about a rapid decline of artisan industries and further worsened the already depressed agricultural economy. That the colonial economy continued to suffer is evident from the similarity between his observations, regarding the condition of the peasantry. In Chunder's opinion from the 'increased cultivation and increased export of produce, the statesman may conclude the agriculturist to be thriving. But he still dwells in a

¹⁰³ Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. One: pp. 168-69.

¹⁰⁴ Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. One: pp. 437-38.

ragged hut, and still lives upon a coarsest rice.’¹⁰⁵ Chunder like most other nationalists of the later years rejected the claim that increased agricultural exports improved the condition of the peasantry of India. Moreover, his observations not only highlighted the detrimental impact of the colonial economic policies on Indian economy but also underscore the fact that colonial policies led to a sustained impoverishment of Indian economy. Foreshadowing the early nationalists concern regarding the de-industrialisation of India, Chunder firmly established that the import of English textiles had a detrimental impact on native weavers and industries. He wrote that ‘the English want to reduce us all to the condition of agriculturists ... England’s boast as a manufacturing power would be at an end, if India followed her own trade and industries.’¹⁰⁶ As a measure Chunder called for protective tariffs in order to boost domestic industries and if that was not possible then he urged the use of ‘the only but most effectual weapon – moral hostility... resolving to non-consume the goods of England’ so as to ‘dethrone King-Cotton of Manchester, and once more re-establish there the Indian sway in the cotton world.’¹⁰⁷ Chunder made a succinct, insightful observation that encapsulated India’s economic experience under British rule. He wrote that the ‘abstraction of capital from India since 1757, under which she is not left but an empty shell.’¹⁰⁸ To Chunder, Britain’s trade policy in India was at first place ‘prohibitive, next aggressive, then suppressive’ and eventually became ‘repressive setting bounds to Native ambition for anything approaching commercial rivalry’.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. One: p. 24.

¹⁰⁶ Dutta, Bholanath Chandra (1822-1910),” p. 264.

¹⁰⁷ Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial India*: p. 45.

¹⁰⁸ Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial India*: p. 45.

¹⁰⁹ Dutta, Bholanath Chandra (1822-1910),” p. 264.

However even though Chunder remained highly critical of the economic policies of the colonial rule, this was paired with his admiration for the British for having introduced English education and science and technology, which he viewed as something necessary to 'modernise' India. It was from this viewpoint that Chunder expressed genuine concern for his nation's progress and yet he considered the rebellion of 1857 to be a 'fatal error' which could have 'plunged the country into the misrule of past ages.'¹¹⁰ He saw the rebellion as 'a struggle between overwhelming hordes and a heroic few, between mind and material, between civilisation and barbarism.'¹¹¹ Instead, Chunder believed that western education would eventually allow India to assert its independence. He believed that India could not attain independence through the use of force, but instead 'the fight of mind against mind has to decide the fate of a battle.'¹¹² According to Chunder, superior knowledge was the best weapon against colonialism but until then, he believed that Indian society should remain under 'the yoke of the English' as it is through colonialism that 'the disjointed masses of India' were brought together 'into the mould of one compact nation'.¹¹³ In Chunder's mind the providential nature of British rule was so strong that in colonial rule he saw 'the government of enlightened legislation, of the science and civilisation of the nineteenth century, of superior intelligence and genius, of knowledge itself.'¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. One: p. 372.

¹¹¹ Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. One: p. 342.

¹¹² Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. One: p. 392.

¹¹³ Bholanauth Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India. Volume Two*, London: N. Trubner, 1869, p. 125.

¹¹⁴ Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. One: p. 372.

5.6 SITUATING THE REBELLION IN HISTORY

As pointed out in the section on the formation of the middle class, the colonial education system emphasised the role of history and the need for historical representation. The purpose of this emphasis was simple: to portray the Indian past as a Dark Age, thereby justifying the colonial rule as bright and benevolent. History thus became a tool to accentuate the difference between the superior West and the backward Orient. Subho Basu has noted that to the middle class literati, under the influence of this education system, it was increasingly becoming apparent that they were denied the status of citizen-subjects.¹¹⁵ In order to successfully claim such status, they realised the need to be a member of a nation-state, which according to the colonial discourse was the privilege of advanced civilisations claiming heritage to classical antiquity. As I argue in this section, the intelligentsia took recourse to the same tool and made use of history in an attempt to rediscover their 'nationalist' past. Making history, as Manu Goswami has pointed out, became coterminous with establishing a national space, that is, a historically continuous national territory.¹¹⁶ History became a tool for generating an awareness of a common past that provided the Calcutta intelligentsia with a sense of common belonging. Sudipta Kaviraj has argued that the forging of a national consciousness required overcoming earlier 'fragmented identities' in order to unite against the forces of colonialism.¹¹⁷ These

¹¹⁵ Subho Basu, "The Dialectics of Resistance: Colonial Geography, Bengali Literati and the Racial Mapping of Indian Identity", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 44, special issue no. 1, January 2010, pp. 53-79: p. 61.

¹¹⁶ Goswami, *Producing India*: p. 167.

¹¹⁷ Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India," in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992: p. 13.

fragmented identities were stitched together by the awareness towards history. While doing so, as I argue, the Calcutta intelligentsia were guided and motivated by the events concerning the rebellion of 1857.

The importance of ‘invoking’ history was recognised by Hurrish Mukherji and others and was most prominent during the rebellion. One must also bear in mind that since the days of the passing of the ‘Gagging Act’ in June 1857, these literati were under constraints to be clear and open in their writings, since they were always under the government scanner, as shown in chapter 2. This is evident from one of Hurrish Mukherji’s comments that he wrote towards the closing years of the rebellion. In dismay he wrote that ‘history would see and evaluate the great Indian Revolt in a manner wholly different from how contemporaries in 1857-58 viewed it.’¹¹⁸ Thus the literati adopted a stance which was to allow them a chance to express their opinion in a language that was not to be stifled by the colonial government.

As mentioned in an earlier section, Hurrish Mukherji found the real cause of the rebellion in the fact that the colonial government neglected that India had a civilisation of her own, and possessed laws and social organisations, which predated the Greeks.¹¹⁹ In this manner, he and other like-minded literati of his times, highlighted the ‘glories’ of India’s past. Others such as Bholanauth Chunder and Jadunath Sarbadhikary through their narratives and travel writings highlighted the history and progress of India, thereby challenging the ‘civilising mission’ of the

¹¹⁸ “The Rebellion,” 31 December 1858, *Hindoo Patriot* quoted in Uttara Chakraborty, “‘Through a Glass Darkly’: Fearful English and the Ambivalent Bengali: Calcutta 1857-58,” in Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty (ed.), *Uprising of 1857: Perspectives and Peripheries*, Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2009: p. 179.

¹¹⁹ “The Mission of the Mutinies,” 18 November 1858, *Hindoo Patriot*, in Ghose, *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 5: p. 99.

colonial rule. But while doing so, as Goswami has noted, these works were not uniformly oppositional in relation to the colonial state, nor were they necessarily anticolonial in the narrow political sense of demanding sovereign statehood.¹²⁰ The significance of these works not just lies in the fact that they prefigure later nationalist historiography, but also because they initiated, in all senses of the word, a conception of Bharat/India as a real, enduring, spatially bounded national entity. As Dharanikanta Lahiri Choudhury, a landed aristocrat of Kalipur, Mymensingh, had pointed out, the best way to understand the past and present of the Indian nation was to see historical places and observe the customs of specific places in India.¹²¹ This is reflected in Bholanauth Chunder's narrative which is replete with historical references. During the course of his journeys, Chunder visited places like Murshidabad, Gaur, Munger, Patna, Benares, Allahabad, Mathura, Brindavan, Delhi, and Agra among others. All these sites together were concrete manifestations of Bharat/India that had to be represented as places of national pride within the narrative of Indian history. For the Calcutta intelligentsia, writing around the time of the rebellion, the achievements of the past inspired pride in the nation, and the existence of symbols of ancient glory manifested as sites that commemorate the nation. The discursive elaboration of India as a spatially bounded and historically determinate national entity marked the constitution of a novel understanding of the liaison between history, territory, and identity.¹²²

¹²⁰ Goswami, *Producing India*: p. 166.

¹²¹ Dharanikanta Lahiri Choudhury, *Bharat Bhraman*, Calcutta: [S.I.], 1910, p. 2. Quoted in Chatterjee, "Discovering India," p. 203.

¹²² Goswami, *Producing India*: p. 166.

The Calcutta literati writing during the time of the rebellion of 1857 situated themselves in a historical grid with the places of the rebellion. In other words, the rebellion became crucial in historicising the places. History of place was linked to the agenda of imagining India/Bharat, as the fate of specific places during the rebellion was regarded as a betrayal of the whole country. Kasiprasad Ghosh – editor of the weekly newspaper *Hindoo Intelligenser*– lamented that the annexation and misfortune of Awadh symbolised a loss of the country’s liberty and independence.¹²³ Similarly Bholanauth Chunder, while writing about India’s past, described Delhi as the ‘the most renowned city on the globe’, and compared it to ancient cities like Babylon, Persepolis, Athens and Carthage.¹²⁴ He referred to Benares as ‘the only town of pre-historic antiquity that yet survives to link the ancient world with the modern.’¹²⁵ Chunder’s claim that Allahabad had once been a Republican State in the heart of ancient India reveals yet another example of the superiority of ancient Indian civilisation. This is particularly significant as colonial discourse characterised India’s weakness as deriving in part from its political tradition of Oriental despotism. Against this backdrop the Bengal literati, as represented in this context by Bholanauth Chunder, pointed to examples of republican state in ancient India. By doing so, they tried to show that India also had democratic/ republican states in the past. This was also reflected in the writing of Jadunath Sarbadhikary who had toured India from 1853 to 1857 and had given us a picture of the rebellion in a historical perspective.¹²⁶ Sarbadhikary was a devout Hindu and his travel from place to place

¹²³ Kasiprasad Ghosh, *Mukherjee’s Magazine*, Vol. 1, 1872.

¹²⁴ Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. Two: p. 129.

¹²⁵ Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. One: p. 240.

¹²⁶ Jadunath Sarbadhikary, *Tirthabhraman (the Journey of a Pilgrim) 1853-1857*, ed. Nagendranath Basu, Calcutta: Ram Kamal Singha, 1915, p. 292.

was essentially a pilgrimage from one centre of Hindu religion to the other. He was mainly interested in the religious institutions of the country and his pages were full of uncritical acceptance of the stories and myths connected with different Hindu religious centres. But, as Snigdha Sen has reminded us, behind this was the ecstasy of one who had gone out of the circumscribed settings of his village to discover the world of Indian tradition rich in Hindu culture where life pulsated over thousand years unruffled by the apparent political changes in the country.¹²⁷ Sarbadhikary's diary provided us with an eye-witness account of the rebellion that reported the uprisings of the 10th, 20th, 38th, 54th and 74th Native Infantry in and around Meerut, Delhi, Kanpur and other nearby places of the Gangetic heartland.¹²⁸

Like Chunder, Sarbadhikary also connected the city of Delhi to its past, and glorified it as the seat of the Emperor and memorialised the place as a site of glory as exemplified in the valour and prowess of King Prithviraj Chauhan who ruled the kingdom of Ajmer and Delhi during the twelfth century. It is indeed interesting to note that in the writings of these literati the places and sites of the rebellion of 1857 were connected with the past instances of valour, courage and glory. For instance, while mentioning about Kanpur, Jadunath recollected how the place once was the forest abode of sage Valmiki. This was the place where 'Sita spent the years of her banishment and where Lav and Kush were born.' Sarbadhikary even went ahead and drew a direct connection between the historical past of the place and its present significance in the context of the rebellion.

¹²⁷ Snigdha Sen, *The Historiography of the Indian Revolt of 1857*, Calcutta: Punthi-Pustak, 1992, p. 116.

¹²⁸ For further details on the regiments that mutinied in north India see the Appendix to Chapter 3 in Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*: pp. 183-86.

Here stands the house of Baji Rao of Pune and Satara. Some soldiers occupy the place and it is the home of Nana Saheb, Baji Rao's descendent... The land of the Marathas had long symbolised independence, courage and strength. Shivaji had shown immortal valour in battle... This inspired Nana Saheb to great acts of courage, and he carried on the legacy of his lineage. To bow down before oppressors is not the mark of a courageous man. Nana Saheb did not... The valour of nana Saheb will always be lauded by history.¹²⁹

As the immediate flares of the rebellion gradually mellowed down these kinds of appropriation of history within the context of the rebellion of 1857 found unabashed expressions in the works of the later day intellectuals towards the closing years of the nineteenth century.¹³⁰

5.7 CONCLUSION

It is therefore evident that the contemporary reactions of the Bengal intelligentsia, being a product and the beneficiary of the colonial rule, vis-à-vis the rebellion had indeed taken a stance that was different from that of the rebel sepoys and leaders of 1857 in the Gangetic heartland. The introduction of western education, print culture, scientific progress and rational thought had certainly influenced Hurrish Mukherji,

¹²⁹ For further details see: Sarbadhikary, *Tirthabhraman (the Journey of a Pilgrim) 1853-1857*: pp. 49-79.

¹³⁰ For a detailed list of works that were published in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century see: Gopal Haldar, "Bengali Literature before and after 1857," in P.C. Joshi (ed.), *Rebellion 1857: A Symposium*, New Delhi: 1957; Swarupa Gupta, "1857 and Ideas about Nationhood in Bengal", in Biswamoy Pati (ed.), *1857: Essays from Economic and Political Weekly*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2008, pp. 279-302.

Bholanauth Chunder, Jadunath Sarbadhikary, and many others of the time to believe that ‘under the auspices of a liberal education and the growth of enlightened sentiments’ the prejudices that existed between the ‘ill-cemented mass of petty nationalities’ could be overcome to ‘form one great welded nation’.¹³¹ However, as this chapter has argued, this appreciation towards colonial rule by the Calcutta intelligentsia was much more complex and nuanced. At least on paper, the Calcutta literati never approved of the open outbursts of the rebellion and were critical towards the atrocities committed by the rebel sepoys and the ‘disgruntled section of the population’. Chunder even considered the rebellion of 1857 to be a ‘fatal error’, which could have ‘plunged the country into the misrule of past ages’.¹³² He saw the rebellion as ‘a struggle between overwhelming hordes and a heroic few, between mind and material, between civilisation and barbarism.’¹³³ But they were also highly aware of the real causes of the disaffection among the population in general. Writing at the time of the rebellion, the Calcutta intelligentsia wished for the speedy end to this crisis, but at the same time recognised the ill-effects of the colonial rule. In spite of the severe restrictions that were imposed upon the newspapers and periodicals, these intellectuals continued to write articles critiquing colonial policies in India, and at times even questioning the legitimacy of colonial rule. The Bengali intelligentsia also used same tools of the colonial empire, including the use of history, in order to glorify the Indian past. This definitely throws some light on the incipient nationalism that was slowly emerging within the Indian society. The rebellion of 1857 played a significant role in this regard. As Sibnath Shastri put it, ‘the excitement of the revolt

¹³¹ Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. One: p. 388.

¹³² Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. One: p. 372.

¹³³ Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. One: p. 342.

did a great benefit to Bengal and her society; a new society was born; a new desire was generated in national life.’¹³⁴ This new desire which Shastri spoke of, found candid expression in Rangalal Bandyopadhyay’s “Padmini Upakhyān” (The Tale of Padmini) written in 1858:¹³⁵

Swadhinata heenatay ke banchite chay he
Ke banchite chae?
Dasatva-srinkhal balo ke paribe pae he
Ke paribe pae?

(Who wants to live without freedom?
Who wants to wear on his feet the chains of slavery?)¹³⁶

As Dušan Zbavitel remarked, Rangalal’s book echoed ‘the newly awakened spirit of patriotism and pride in the past glory of India that was soon to take a deep root in

¹³⁴ Sibnath Shastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bangasamaj (Ramtanu Lahiri and the Contemporary Bengali Society)*, 2nd ed., Calcutta: New Age Publishers, 1957, p. 201. Sibnath Shastri (1847-1919) was an intellectual and an author who had studied under Iswarchandra Vidyasagar. He chose teaching as a profession and was the editor of socio-literary journal *Somprakash* (1873-74). He is known for his contribution towards the socio-religious history of Bengal in the nineteenth century. Shastri’s quality of introspection, innocent domestic humour in the literatures was highly praised by Rabindranath Tagore. The book *Ramtanu Lahiri and the Contemporary Bengali Society* (Bengali 1903; English trans., 1907) was one of the best examples of Shastri’s capability of portraying the socio-religious history of nineteenth century Bengal. The other notable contribution of Shastri was his literary work *Yugantar (The Transition of an Epoch)* published in 1875. Mohan Lal, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1992.

¹³⁵ Rangalal Bandyopadhyay, *Padmini Upakhyān (the Tale of Padmini)*, Reprint ed., Calcutta: Purnachandra Mukhopadhyay, 1905. Rangalal Bandyopadhyay (1827-1887) was a poet and journalist, was born at Bakulia in the district of Hughli, in present-day West Bengal. He was appointed Assistant Editor of the newly published *Education Gazette* (1855), in which both his prose writings as well as poems were published. Rangalal’s first, and perhaps most important, literary achievement is *Padmini Upakhyān* (1858), a historical romance based on Colonel James Todd’s *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Bandyopadhyay, “From Subjects to Citizens,” p. 26.

Bengali literatures.’¹³⁷ The idea also found expression in Ajit Kumar Chakraborty’s biography of Debendranath Tagore.¹³⁸ Tagore was descending from the Himalayas when the rebellion was in full swing. When the rebellion finally came to an end Tagore observed that ‘the fire of Revolt died down, but it sowed a new seed in the soil of Bengal... the beginning of this new phase can be regarded as an outcome of the conflagration of 1857.’¹³⁹ It was this new spirit, emanating from the rebellion of 1857, which was responsible for the gradual development of an ideological critique of colonialism and the assertion of the rights of citizenship by the turn of the century.

¹³⁷ Dušan Zbavitel, *A History of Indian Literature*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976, p. 231.

¹³⁸ Ajit Kumar Chakraborty, *Maharshi Debendranath Tagore*, Allahabad: S.I., 1916.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Swarupa Gupta, "1857 and Ideas About Nationhood in Bengal: Nuances and Themes," in Biswamoy Pati (ed.), *1857 Essays from Economic and Political Weekly*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2008: p. 285.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has addressed the rebellion of 1857 as it unfolded in the lower province of the Bengal Presidency and Assam. With the help of the hitherto under-utilised sources, it has argued for a more nuanced understanding of the rebellion of 1857 than has hitherto been the case in the past. For the last thirty years historians have emerged from the constricted framework of imperialist-nationalist perspectives on the rebellion and analysed the various fissures within the uprising. There can hardly be any doubt that the rebellion was indeed multidimensional and multifaceted in character. And yet, apart from a few recent efforts, the history of the rebellion of 1857 continues to be studied based on the north-central Gangetic heartland, assuming that except for parts of northern and central India, other regions remained firmly ensconced in the loyalist fold. According to the canonical version of the story, the even tenor of life in Bengal and the quietude of Madras were hardly disturbed. The sporadic incidents that might have occurred elsewhere were merely incidental to the main events in northern India.

As this thesis has shown, the scope of the rebellion went far beyond the Gangetic heartland. Taking the lower province of Bengal and Assam as a case study this thesis not just extends the scope of the rebellion, but, at the same time, brings out the multi-dimensional character of the uprising based on the specificities of the region. As the thesis argued the rebellion of 1857 was not a unified phenomenon but the regions were nonetheless inter-connected with varying multitude. Setting the context in the first chapter, it becomes clear that the principle areas of recruitment of the Bengal army had been from the districts of western Bihar, Awadh, Lucknow,

Meerut, Kanpur, and Benares. It is also evident that all these 'purbia' sepoys were mostly recruited from the high caste Hindu peasants, mostly the Rajputs, who were the traditional warrior caste of North and North-West India, or 'Bhumihars', the military wing of the priestly caste of Brahmins, or Brahmins themselves.¹ This resulted in an extremely homogenous body of sepoys in the Bengal army. As Wagner has reminded us, reluctant to interfere too much in local governance, British policy-makers during this early period generally sought to adopt and preserve Indian traditions and institutions as far as possible.² The existing pool of military labour based around the 'mutiny country' of northern India provided the Company a necessary framework within which to build up its own army. The absence of recruitment from the lower province of Bengal prior to the British intervention was received and interpreted by the colonial ideologues in terms of 'martial race' theory. As a consequence even in the 1830's and 40's when the Company introduced certain changes in the recruitment pattern of the army, lower province of Bengal was still not considered as 'ideal' for the purpose. Considering this, it is not surprising that the sepoys stationed in the lower province had no formal attachment to the land of the immediate neighbourhood. When the rebellion broke out in 1857 these sepoys therefore were more concerned to return to their own districts carrying with them the message of the rebellion. This also partially explains the time difference noticeable between the outbreak of the mutiny of the 34th Bengal Native Infantry in Barrackpore and the mutiny in Meerut.

With the composition and recruitment pattern of the Bengal army as a backdrop, the chapter 2 discussed the run-up phase to the rebellion, focussing

¹ Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company*: p. 52.

² Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: p. 33.

primarily on the circulation of rumours, which played a significant role in the spread of information leading to the formal outbreak of the rebellion in the province. The chapter examined the importance of the cumulative effect of incidences of rebellion in the Gangetic heartland, the circulation of various forms of information (both verified and unverified) and the role of ‘conspiracies’, in the actions of the colonial government. In the thesis I have used the notion of ‘information panic’ – famously used by C.A. Bayly – to describe the inability of the British officials as well as the rebels to effectively gather and interpret information relating to the rebellion.³ This concept can perhaps be applied equally to Indian misreadings of the British. The uprising was in fact precipitated by what may appropriately be described as an ‘information panic’ amongst the sepoys and part of the Indian population who saw in British reforms a direct attack on their culture and society. Religion represented the social order of Indian society for both Hindus and Muslims and the sepoys’ fears of the greased cartridges thus embodied much more general concerns over British intrusion. The circulation of rumour has been used extensively as an important historical tool for analysing the contours of the rebellion in the region. Considerable research has described how rumour often acts as a trigger and a mobiliser in pre-literate and pre-capitalist agrarian societies. However, the efficacy of rumour is not diminished even in modern industrial societies and, as Rajnarayan Chandavarkar has argued, even the elites were susceptible to it.⁴ The fear and panic that had gripped the European (both civil and official) population of Calcutta and its surroundings as a result of the rumours – ranging from the impending downfall of the colonial rule, to

³ Bayly, *Empire and Information*: pp. 171-74.

⁴ Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, ‘Plague Panic and Epidemic Politics in India, 1896–1914’, in *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850-1950*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 234–265.

the mass extermination of all the Europeans and other loyal subjects of the Raj – validates this argument. Chandavarkar however had his reservation in adducing rumours as historical sources, contending that since the evidence were sourced from official archives compiled by the middle classes, their authenticity was in doubt.⁵ Another perspective has been put forward by Luise White. Dealing with the rumours of blood-sucking vampire stories in colonial East Africa, White argues that narratives based on rumour with all their ‘contested details’ and ‘loose-ends’ can prove to be valuable sources of the victim’s cognitive world and perception.⁶ This line of argument is in fact best reflected in George Lefebvre’s *The Great Fear of 1789*. In the context of the rural panic in revolutionary France, Lefebvre argued that ‘what matters in seeking an explanation for the Great Fear is not so much the actual truth as what the people thought the aristocracy could and would do’.⁷ In other words, as Kim Wagner noted, the accuracy of rumours is essentially immaterial, and whether or not they were true, they had very real consequences.⁸

This fear and apprehension arising out of rumours, as this thesis shows, had some serious repercussions on the natives and the Europeans alike. In spite of the efforts of the colonial government to allay popular anxieties, rumours concerning the forced conversion of the natives were indeed strong, as evident from the proclamations and anonymous petitions. From the European perspective, there was a fear of things happening just under the surface, unknown to the administration and kept secret by the native population. The arrival of rebel sepoys in Calcutta, the

⁵ Chandavarkar, “Plague Panic and Epidemic Politics in India”, p. 251.

⁶ Quoted in Anjan Ghosh, “The Role of Rumour in History Writing”, *History Compass*, 6/5, 2008: 1235–1243, p. 1238

⁷ Ghosh, “The Role of Rumour in History Writing”, p. 1238.

⁸ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: p. 23.

conspiracy planned by the erstwhile Nawab of Awadh, the possible alliance with the Amirs of Sindh with the rebellious elements in Calcutta, the influence established by the Wahabis and Faraizis and their connection with the disaffected elements in eastern Bengal, bears testimony to the argument. This perceived or real threat assumed alarming proportions in times of unrest, when the British found themselves unable to obtain access and effectively gather information about their Indian subjects. Similarly, the mutineers were on many occasions persuaded by the rumour and prophecies of the impending downfall of the British Empire. The efficacy of fear and panic amongst the Europeans were not just confined to Calcutta or its hinterland. Drawing a parallel to the situation in the eastern Bengal (present-day Bangladesh) and its cumulative impact in the Straits Settlements, the thesis also has argued that the potential threat transgressed beyond the more active theatres of the rebellion within India and had far reaching consequences. These parallels, along with the covert participation of sections of the population in Bhutan and Nepal during the rebellion, make the conflagration of 1857 sub-continental in its scope.⁹ The thesis has attempted to make the rumours, panics, and their consequences the object of a study in their own right.

The inability to comprehend the information relating to the rebellion led to major consequences. The scale and ferocity of systematic destruction of the telegraph lines and offices in various places of northern and central India, and also in the lower provinces of the Bengal presidency, which included Raniganj, Barrackpore,

⁹ Amongst the recent publications that has dealt with the various aspects of the Indian uprising in a global perspective, see: Marina Carter and Crispin Bates (eds.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume 3: Global Perspectives, London: Sage Publications, 2013; Shaswati Mazumdar (ed.), *Insurgent Sepoys: Europe Views the Revolt of 1857*, London, New Delhi: Routledge, 2011.

Chittagong, Dhaka, and Assam, suggests that it was one of the primary military targets for the rebels. By examining the way the rebellion spread it appears indeed that much of the military action occurred along the telegraph routes. Crispin Bates and Marina Carter have noted how the war over telegraph lines was a corollary of the general conflict of 1857. The British administration attempted to restore telegraph lines as quickly as mutineers disabled them.¹⁰ But the unwillingness of the colonial government to build a telegraph line between Calcutta and Madras proved to be a major problem when the authorities in Calcutta were starved of official information because of the formal breakdown of the government's communication network in northern India.¹¹ By July 1857 four hundred miles of telegraph lines from Agra to Indore, one eighty miles from Kanpur to Agra and one seventy eight miles from Agra to Delhi had been totally destroyed.¹² In addition to the destruction of telegraph lines, the rebels also targeted the Grand Trunk road, cutting it off at various points.¹³ As a consequence the colonial government in Calcutta was clueless regarding the precise activities and movement of the mutineers, and could only rely upon the second-hand

¹⁰ Marina Carter and Crispin Bates, "Introduction: Global Networks and Perspectives on the Indian Uprising", in *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume 3: Global Perspectives, London: Sage Publications, 2013, p. xviii.

¹¹ Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, "1857 and the Communication Crisis", in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Rethinking 1857*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007, p. 266. Also see: Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, "Clemency Canning, the Telegraph, Information and Censorship during 1857", in Marina Carter and Crispin Bates (eds.), *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume 3: Global Perspectives, London: Sage Publications, pp. 67-86.

¹² Letter sent from the Acting Superintendent of the Telegraph, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 15 July 1857, Home Department, Public Proceedings Number.5-6, 14 August 1857, NAI.

¹³ For a more detailed discussion on this see: Ritambhari Devi, *Indian Mutiny: 1857 in Bihar*, Delhi: Orient Publications, 1989, p. 147.

information supplied by civil authorities.¹⁴ Interestingly what had unnerved the colonial government at this stage was that the press was becoming a vehicle for all sorts of gossip, information and misinformation and a potential alternative to ‘official’ information supplied from the government. To cite one such example, on 13 June 1857, *Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette* translated and reproduced a proclamation issued by the rebels in Delhi, so that ‘the Government and the European public in Calcutta are aware of such publicity among the native community’.¹⁵

Unsurprisingly, the circulation of these types of report and proclamations made the European inhabitants as well as the colonial government seriously concerned regarding the safety of Calcutta and its hinterland. As Alexander Duff interpreted, the fall of Calcutta in the hands of the rebels would have meant the actual fall of the British Empire in the whole of the subcontinent. This concern was reflected in the radical steps taken by the colonial government in order to tackle the situation. The ‘Gagging’ Act of 1857 that stifled the voice of the press, the extraordinary powers given to the civil and military officers to carry out ‘kangaroo trials’, the unexpected increase in the sale of the fire-arms among the European population of Calcutta, the unsystematic recruitment of the European sailors and other volunteer guards for the protection of the city and in the regions further east of the lower province of Bengal, - all of these developments indicate that there was in reality a crisis of the state in colonial Bengal.

¹⁴ The Governor-General of India in Council to the Court of Directors of the East India Company dated 5 June 1857, Letter Number 19, HCPP, Mutinies in the East Indies, BLOC.

¹⁵ “A Seditious Proclamation”, *Bengal Hurkaru and India Gazette*, 13 June 1857.

The crisis was further augmented by the manifestations of rumour, ‘conspiracies’ and the subsequent panic that followed, resulting in the actual outburst of acts of rebellion by sepoys. Other than examples in Calcutta itself, the districts of lower Bengal throw up standard instances of riot and lawlessness, as took place in Purulia, when there was a withdrawal of the officer corps in anticipation of a wider mutiny. Chapter three takes this story further into the districts of Eastern Bengal, where the presence and activities of Wahabis and Faraizi sects had already created a climate of uneasiness even prior to the outbreak of the rebellion. As Bayly noted, in British eyes, one of the most dangerous networks of sedition was maintained by Muslims of the purist (Wahabi) tradition.¹⁶ Many officials came to believe that the whole Muslim community was implicated in the rebellion. In order to prevent the possible convergence of these sects with the rebels of 1857, the colonial government extended the jurisdiction of the Dacoity Commission and apprehended those who they thought were privy to the conspiracy. From the statements of Najid Bechu Singh and others it is evident that the suspected mutineers had prepared, in accordance with the rebel sepoys of Barrackpore and Allahabad, a plan of action to be followed during the rebellion in the region. However, the timely interference of the government disrupted this whole scheme of things for the rebels.

Moving on to the subsequent course of events we witnessed more broad ranging incidents at the military cantonments eventually leading to the formal outbreak of rebellion in Chittagong and Dhaka. A few observations have been made while analysing the nature and character of the rebellion in these two military stations. Once again, following the narrative of the events in the chronological

¹⁶ Bayly, *Empire and Information*: p. 318.

sequence, it becomes clear that the rebel sepoys in these cantonments had established an informal network of communication with the sepoys, both within the region and also with the rebel sepoys of northern India. The mutinies also followed a similar pattern to that of the rebels in the Gangetic heartland. In the cantonments of Chittagong as well as in Dhaka there were scenes of extensive firing, burning down of the bungalows and properties owned by the British, destroying the electric telegraph networks, looting of the state treasuries, and breaking open of jails thereby releasing the prisoners, before moving on towards their respective headquarters. From the evidences provided in the narrative it is plausible to argue that the mutinous sepoys were planning to move closer towards the more active theatres of rebellion. The stark similarity of the rebel actions in the cantonments situated miles apart is suggestive of connections of regions between the lower province of Bengal and the north-central Gangetic heartland.

It must be admitted that in spite of having some of the necessary pre-conditions, the rebellion failed to generate wider mass base in the region, unlike the districts in Awadh. In other words, the mutiny of the sepoys never turned into a civil rebellion in the lower presidency of Bengal. This was mainly because of the absence of any formal attachment of the rebel sepoys to the land and rural population in the region. As a result the disaffection of the sepoys and dissatisfaction of the sections of the population towards the colonial rule never really coincided. The course that the rebels followed after the mutiny in the cantonments gives us a clear indication that they were more interested to join their comrades and reinforce the resistance in the Gangetic heartland, the same area where they were recruited from, rather than broadening their mass base within the region. Nevertheless, the thesis has provided

enough evidence to believe that the sepoys did receive some covert support and sympathy from dissident local groups around the neighbouring regions, such as the Manipur princes, the Chera chiefs, the zamindars of Pachete, Nepal, Bhutan and even the Kookie tribesmen.

Moving on to chapter 3 in Assam, the region presented yet another interesting case study that showed the extent to which the regional specificities mattered during the crisis of 1857. In sharp contrast to the regions covered in chapters 2 and 3, in Assam we witness the actual convergence of the rebellion, the actions of the elites, popular unrest and the counter-insurgency of the colonial state. Unlike the lower province of the Bengal presidency, Assam came under the colonial dominion only about twenty years prior to the outbreak of the rebellion and witnessed certain radical socio-political and economic changes. Our discussion of the historical background provided a glimpse into this transformation, which also explains the reason for the dissatisfaction and hostility of landed elites towards the colonial rule even prior to 1857. To put it simply, there were already enough incendiary materials in Assam for the rebellion to feed on. The outbreak of the rebellion in 1857 provided these disgruntled nobilities the much needed opportunity. As the chapter argued, the composition and recruitment pattern of the army played a crucial role in forging this vital link between the sepoys and the civil population. Unlike the other regiments of the Bengal native Infantry of the lower province of Bengal, the regiments posted in Assam were more heterogeneous in nature which, in addition to the ‘purbia’ sepoys, was mostly comprised of local recruits. Together these provided the adequate pre-conditions necessary for the intended rebellion. The circulation of rumours about the downfall of the British rule in India, the harrowing tales of the massacre of

Europeans carried by wanderer and fakirs, along with the newspapers, reports, personal letters from Calcutta and elsewhere, played a crucial role in providing the necessary spark in the region. Attempts were made by those associated with insurrection in the province – Maniram Diwan, Piyali Barua and Nirmal Hazari – to establish links with military detachments in Golaghat (Sibsagar district), Debrugarh and Saikhowa. The details of the proposed plan of attack and the actions to be taken thereafter – as evident from the deposition of Keramat Ali – provided us with a clear picture of the rebel intention.

The failure of the intended rebellion in Assam was due to the lack of coordination amongst the rebel leaders and the native sepoys. The inability to comprehend the information that was in circulation related to the rebellion proved to be decisive from the rebel perspective. Rumour played a crucial role in changing the contour of the intended rebellion in Assam. As is shown in the chapter, the rebellion was initially planned for later in the year when Maniram Diwan was to return from Calcutta. However, vague reports and the floating rumour about the European officials fleeing the region along with their money and ammunition made the rebellious sepoys confused and uncoordinated. While a section felt that an immediate action was the call of the day, others wanted to tread with caution. This eventually delayed the whole operation thereby providing the colonial administration enough time and opportunity to spoil their plans and track down the rebels. It is also interesting to note that the traditional leadership also played an important factor during the intended rebellion of 1857 in Assam. In spite of the British intervention and the changes that were introduced in Assam, the society remained highly feudal in character. The failure of earlier rebellions in Assam convinced Maniram Diwan that

in order to put up a strong and united force capable of resisting the colonial rule he needed to rally behind the legitimate leader of the Ahom dynasty. The letters written by the Diwan during the rebellion of 1857 - either addressed directly to the young Rajah, or to the rebellious landed elites and other nobilities on behalf of the King – bears testimony to his intention. In the absence of Maniram (then residing in Calcutta) local magnates - Piyali Barua, Nirmal Hazari and others – took recourse to the same method by asking the sepoys to join the rebel cause in the name of the King of Assam.

It is thus safe to infer that the reactions and responses towards the rebellion were indeed multi-layered and permeated regions well beyond the Gangetic heartland. The differential character and outcome of the rebellion was not always entirely dependent on the landlord-peasant relation, as suggested by Mukherjee, or the collective action of the ‘people’, as argued by Roy.¹⁷ This study argued that the rebellion of 1857 was far more complicated in nature and the responses were varied and complex. This complexity has been explained in the last chapter, which investigates the response of the middle class intelligentsia in Bengal towards the rebellion.

Contrary to the stereotypical portrayal of the middle class intelligentsia as the ‘loyal’ supporters of the British during the time of the rebellion there is a need, as argued in the chapter, for a more nuanced understanding of such terminologies. As pointed out by C.A. Bayly, and touched upon by Anderson ‘the boundary between “revolt” and “collaboration” was often very faint.’¹⁸ In Bengal, the ‘loyalism’ of the

¹⁷ Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt*; Roy, *The Politics of a Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857*.

¹⁸ Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*: p. 170.

intelligentsia contained internal dilemmas and contradictions, thus opening a space for moving beyond terminologies of 'loyalist' or 'rebel'. Opposition towards the colonial rule need not always be overt or armed. The contemporary intelligentsia in Bengal viewed the armed rebellion of 1857 in north and central India and the situation in Bengal as two expressive facets and the results of the same discontent. As we explored the writings of personalities such as Hurrish Chandra Mukherji and Bholanauth Chunder, it becomes clear that the opposition was articulated in a rhetoric that was different from those of the 'rebel' leaders of 1857. The intelligentsia of Bengal certainly did not appreciate the open outbursts of violence and the bloodshed that would, in their opinion, have taken the country into a state of total disarray. However, at the same time they were objective enough to see the 'real' reasons behind this insurrection, even questioning the viability of the presence of the colonial rule in the subcontinent. As a corollary to this, the Calcutta intelligentsia invoked History in an attempt to stitch together their earlier fragmented identities, by initiating the process of rediscovering their 'nationalist' past. In other words, History became a tool for generating an awareness of a past that provided the Calcutta intelligentsia with a sense of common belonging. While doing so, as I argued, the rebellion of 1857 played an important role in historicising the geographical spaces. In the writings of the Calcutta literati the sites of the rebellion of 1857 were now connected with the past instances of valour, glory, courage and unity of India/Bharat.

The chapter follows a somewhat similar argument been made by Avril Powell and Mushirul Hasan in the context of the response of Muslim intelligentsia in

northern India during the rebellion of 1857.¹⁹ As Markus Daechsel has pointed out, the Indian Muslim elites/intelligentsia were never easily divisible into ‘modernist loyalists’ and ‘traditionalist’ rebels, but had on the whole occupied a pragmatic position with regards to their non-Muslim overlords.²⁰ Revisiting the writings and outlooks of several Muslim intellectuals associated with the Delhi College, where a great deal of intellectual exchanges had taken place, Hasan has persuasively argued that for men of this generation and background, their individual responses to 1857 were always going to be far more complex than the dichotomy between official narratives of loyalism and anti-imperialism. Similar to the middle class intelligentsia in Bengal, the Muslim intellectuals of north India, as Hasan maintained, were often as bewildered as the British and criticised the violence of the rebellion itself, while at the same time remained acutely sensitive to the cultural and human loss suffered.²¹ This understanding and the implicit critique of the colonial rule were to a large extent shaped by the events and memories of 1857, and were to be articulated in a more unabashed way in the course of the second half of the nineteenth-century, culminating with the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885, and the emergence of a new informed political consciousness.

¹⁹ Avril Powell, “Questionable Loyalties: Muslim Government Servants and Rebellion” in Crispin Bates (ed.) *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume 5: Muslim Dalit and Subaltern Narratives, London: Sage Publications, 2014, pp. 82-102; Mushirul Hasan, “The Legacies of 1857 among the Muslim Intelligentsia of North India” in Crispin Bates (ed.) *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume 5: Muslim Dalit and Subaltern Narratives, London: Sage Publications, 2014, pp. 103-116.

²⁰ Markus Daechsel, “Introduction”, in Crispin Bates (ed.) *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857*, Volume 5: Muslim Dalit and Subaltern Narratives, London: Sage Publications, 2014, p. xxi.

²¹ For a more detailed study see: Mushirul Hasan, *A Moral Reckoning: Muslim Intellectuals in Nineteenth-Century Delhi*, London; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

From the British perspective, the trial of the Mughal Emperor followed by the Queen's Proclamation in 1 November 1858 marked the beginning of a new order in Indian administration.²² With the Act of Parliament, the Queen now took over the formal responsibility of administering affairs relating to India, thereby marking the end of the Company rule. One vital aspect that the Proclamation acknowledged was that 'there was an indigenous diversity in culture, society and religion in India.'²³ The rebellion of 1857 henceforth was looked upon as a watershed in this context, demarcating crucial changes that were to be brought about in the subsequent years.²⁴ As Bernard Cohn pointed out, 'to the British ruling elites, at home and in India, the meanings attached to the events of 1857-58, and the resulting constitutional changes, were increasingly the pivot around which their theory of colonial rule rotated.'²⁵ One of the most significant legacies of the uprising was arguably the manner in which the British henceforth perceived any kind of anti-colonial sentiments amongst the Indians.²⁶ From Lord Lytton in the 1870s through General Dyer in 1918 to Tottenham in 1942 the spectre of the uprising of 1857 haunted the administrators whenever they were called upon to deal with a mass upsurge. One might recall Brigadier General Reginald Dyer who was summoned to Amritsar by the colonial administration during the Rowlatt Satyagraha in 1919. Shortly before he left for

²² "Queen Victoria's Proclamation, 1 November 1858" in C. H. Philips, *The Evolution of India and Pakistan, 1858 to 1947: Select Documents*, London: Oxford University Press, 1962, pp. 10-11. Also see: E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 178-79.

²³ Bernard S. Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India", in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983: pp. 165-210: p. 168.

²⁴ For further details see Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt, India, 1857-1870*.

²⁵ Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," p. 179.

²⁶ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*: p. 241.

Amritsar, Dyer confided to his son that since the Hindus and the Muslims had joined hands he apprehended something like a re-enactment of 1857. Even otherwise, too, the lessons of the rebellion were not forgotten. To cite one example among many, in the early years of the last century, George Nathaniel Curzon, the Viceroy of India between 1899-1905, decided to build a memorial for the departed Queen Victoria. As he explained, the proposed hall was to serve primarily as a Monument to the Queen, and, secondarily, as a National Gallery and Valhalla for the Indian Empire. He personally listed the objects to be displayed. As David Gilmour, his latest biographer reminded us, enemies of Britain would be included if they were honourable and valiant foes like Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan. But Curzon declared, he would not 'admit so much as the fringe of the *pagri* of a ruffian like Nana Sahib, the butcher of Cawnpore.'²⁷

The continuing significance and relevance attached with the memory of this epoch event, both in India as well as in United Kingdom, can also be demonstrated by citing another example. In September 2007 (the year marked the 150th anniversary of the uprising of 1857-58) a group of approximately nineteen British tourists ran into unexpected trouble while they were visiting some of the key sites of the Indian Uprising of 1857. In the memory of the 'courage and valour and the distinguished service' displayed by the members of the 60th Queen's Royal Rifles, these men belonging to the same regiment, wanted to put up a stone plaque at St. John's Church in Meerut. The church incidentally stands on the periphery of the parade ground where Indian soldiers had revolted in the year 1857. However, the authorities heavily objected to this in view of the fact that 'The 60th QRR was one

²⁷ David Gilmour, *Curzon*, London: John Murray, 1994: p. 235.

of the regiments that led the massacre of native soldiers' and thus 'trying to put up this plaque (would have been) an insult to Indians'. During a later visit to the Residency at Lucknow, the group had to be escorted away by the police when surrounded by an angry crowd and pelted with stones and bottles. A few days later the tour was eventually aborted.²⁸ A similar such incident happened following a controversy that was sparked off by the restoration of the grave in Delhi of John Nicholson who led the British counter attack on Delhi in 1857 in an attempt to recover the city from the rebels. The grave was renovated by the British government, provoking a huge public outcry in India since it was seen as an affront to the nationalist sentiments.²⁹ These examples bear testimony to the continued importance and interest in the memory of the Uprising of 1857, far transcending the limits of immediate history of the events themselves.

²⁸ I am grateful to Dr. Kim Wagner who had forwarded me this source of information. For further details see *The Hindustan Times*, 21 September 2007.

²⁹ Mukherjee Rudrangshu, "More Than Grave – Remembering 1857 should be free of Revenge", *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 5 November, 2006.

APPENDIX A

TABLE 7

List of the Bengal Army Corrected to the 20th of October 1857

Calcutta, Disposition of the Bengal Army

STATION	CORPS	STAFF
FORT WILLIAM	Garrison	<i>The Right Hon'ble</i> Charles John Viscount Canning } Governor Lieut. Colonel... Commanding the troops in the garrison Lieut. Colonel O. Cavenagh. 32 N.I., Town and Fort Major, and <i>ex-officio</i> Superintendent of Gentlemen Cadets Captain M.R. Nightingale, 2d En. B.F., Fort Adjutant and Deputy Superintendent of Gentlemen Cadets Captain B.D.W. Ramsay, H.M.'s 75 th Foot, Brigade Major, Queen's troops Surgeon E. Campbell, Garrison Surgeon Assistant Surgeon N.C. Macnamara, Garrison Assistant Surgeon
	Her Majesty's Troops (Artillery and Infantry)	
	Detachments native infantry	
CALCUTTA	The left wing H.M. 29 th foot	
ALLYPORE	Calcutta Native Militia	
BALLYGUNGE	Governor general's Bodyguard	
CALCUTTA	Volunteer Guards (Artillery, Cavalry and Infantry)	

BARRACKPORE	Presidency Division	Major General <i>Sir</i> J.B. Hearsay, K.C.B., 6 th L.C., comg. The division
	Her Majesty's 35 th foot (2 companies at Berhampore) 2d native infantry (grenadiers) Officers of the late 19 th native infantry 32 nd native infantry 34 th native infantry 43 rd native (light) infantry 70 th native infantry	Lieutenant J. Hearsay, 38 th regiment, L.I., Aide-de-Camp Major A.H. Ross, 42 nd regt. L.I., Assistant Adjutant General Captain G.C. Hatch, 57 th N.I., Deputy Judge, Advocate General – Attached to Army Head Quarters Captain G.N. Greene, 70 th N.I., offg. Depy. Judge Advocate General

		<p>Major T. Martin, 20th N.I., Pay Master</p> <p>Captain W.W. Aubert, 34th N.I., Pay Mr. and Supdt. of Native pensioners</p> <p>Senior Surgeon E. Tritton, Supg. Surgeon with the field force before Delhi</p> <p>Senior Surgeon G.G. Brown, Supg. Surgeon in charge</p> <p>Brigadier C. Grant, C.B., Artillery, commanding the station</p> <p>Captain S. Richards, 55th N.I., Brigade Major</p>
DUMDUM	<p>The Head Quarters of the 5th Battalion Artillery</p> <p>The Head Quarters and 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th companies of the 9th Battalion native foot artillery</p>	<p>Lieut. Colonel C.S. Reid, artillery, commanding</p> <p>Lieut. A.W. Pixley, Adjutant of the 9th battalion artillery, Station and Artillery division Staff</p> <p>Lieut. C. McW. Mercer, of the 1st company 8th battalion artillery, acting station and Artillery division Staff</p>
DUMDUM	Depot for Her Majesty's troops	<p>Major W. Bell, H.M. 32nd Foot, commanding 7th January 1857</p> <p>Captain J. Whiteside, H.M. 8th Foot, Staff Officer, 6th August 1857</p> <p>Ensign E.C.s. Hely, H.M. 84th Foot, acting Adjutant</p> <p>Assistant Surgeon A.P. Cahill, M.D., H.M. 32nd Foot, in medical charge</p>
COSSIPORE	Depot of H.C. troops	Captain F.W. Swinhoe, arty., in charge
BERHAMPORE	<p>A detail of native foot artillery</p> <p>2 companies of H.M. 35th foot</p> <p>63rd native infantry</p> <p>11th irregular cavalry</p>	<p>Lieutenant Colonel J.C. Hannington, 63rd N.I., comg.</p> <p>Lieutenant H. Campbell, Intr. and Qr. Mr. of the 63rd N.I., station staff and in charge of the post guns</p>
MIDNAPORE	Shekhawattee battn. (the Head Quarters and a wing en route to Chyebassa)	
BANCOORAH	Det. Shekhawattee battalion	

CHITTAGONG	Three cos. 34 th native infantry	
EASTERN FRONTIER		
JELPIGOREE	73 rd native infantry Det. 11 th irregular infantry	
DACCA	A detail of native foot artillery Two companies of 73 rd native infantry Det. Sylhet Light infantry battalion	
CHERRA POONJEE	Sylhet Light infantry battalion with two six-pounders attached	
SYLHET AND CACHAR	Detachment Sylhet light infantry battalion with Kookee levy	
DEBROOGURH	1 st Assam light infantry battalion A company of Assam local party.	
JOREHATH GOWALPARA SEEBAGUR GOLAGHAUT	Detachment 1 st Assam light infantry battalion	
GOWAHATTY	2 nd Assam light infantry battalion	
NOWGONG TEZPORE	Detachment 2 nd Assam light infantry battalion	

**The troops serving in Assam and Sylhet have been placed under the military command of the Agent to the Governor General, North Eastern Frontier.*

APPENDIX B

The Gagging Act

From The Calcutta Gazette

Legislative Council, 13th June, 1857

THE following Act, passed by the Legislative Council of India, received the assent of the Right Honourable the Governor-General this day, and is hereby promulgated for general information.

ACT No. XV. OF 1857

"An Act to regulate the Establishment of Printing Presses and to restrain in certain Cases the Circulation of Printed Books and Papers."

Whereas it is expedient to prohibit the keeping or using of printing-presses, types, or other materials for printing, in any part of the territories in the possession and under the government of the East India Company, except with the previous sanction and license of Government, and under suitable provisions to guard against abuse ; and whereas it may be deemed proper to prohibit the circulation, within the said territories, of newspapers, books, or other printed papers of a particular description : It is enacted as follows :

I. No person shall keep any printing-press or types, or other materials or articles for printing, without having obtained the previous sanction and license for that purpose of the Governor-General of India in Council, or of the Executive Government of the Presidency in which such printing-press, types, or other materials or articles for printing are intended to be kept or used, or of such other person or persons as the Governor-General of India in Council may authorize to grant such sanction or license ; and any person who shall keep or use any printing-press, or types, or other materials or articles for printing, without having obtained such licenses, shall be liable, on conviction before a magistrate, to a fine not exceeding five thousand rupees, or to imprisonment not exceeding two years, or to both.

II. If any person shall keep or use any printing-press, or types, or other materials or articles for printing, without such sanction or licenses aforesaid, any magistrate, within whose jurisdiction the same may be found, may seize the same, or cause them to be seized, together with any books or printed papers found on the premises ; and shall dispose of the same as the Governor-General of India in Council, or the Executive Government of any Presidency, or such other person as the Governor-General in Council shall authorize in that behalf, may direct ; and it shall be lawful for any magistrate to issue a search-warrant for the entry and search of any house, building, or other place, in which he may have reason to believe that any such unlicensed printing-press, types, or other materials or articles for printing are kept or used.

III. Whenever any person or persons shall be desirous of keeping or using any printing-press, or types, or other materials or articles for printing, he or they shall apply by writing to the magistrate within whose jurisdiction he proposes to keep or use such press or other such materials or articles as aforesaid, or to such other persons as the Governor-General in Council, or the Executive Government of the Presidency, or such other person as the Governor-General in Council shall authorize in that behalf, may appoint for that purpose. The application shall specify the name, profession, and place of abode of the proprietor or proprietors of such printing-press, types, or other materials or articles for printing, and of the person or persons who is or are intended to use the same, and the place where such printing-press, types, or other materials or articles for printing are intended to be used; and such application shall be verified by the oath, affirmation, or solemn declaration of the proprietors and persons intending to keep or use such printing-press, types, or other materials or articles for printing, or such of them as the magistrate or other person to whom the application shall be made shall direct: and any person willfully making a false oath, affirmation or declaration shall be deemed guilty of perjury.

IV. The magistrate shall forward a copy of such application to the Governor-General in Council, or to the Executive Government of the Presidency, or to such other person as may be authorized to grant the license; and the said Governor-General in Council, or such Executive Government, or other person as aforesaid, may at his or their discretion grant such license subject to such conditions (if any) as he or they may think fit, and may also at any time revoke the same.

V. If any person or persons shall keep or use, or cause or allow to be kept or used, any such printing-press, types, or other materials or articles for printing, contrary to the conditions upon which the license may have been granted, or after notice of the revocation of such license shall have been given to, or left for, him or them at the place at which the printing-press shall have been established, he or they shall be subject to the same penalties as if no such license had been granted; and such printing-press, types, and other materials or articles for printing may be seized and disposed of in the manner prescribed in Section II of this Act.

VI. All books and other papers, printed at a press licensed under this Act, shall have printed legibly thereon the name of the printer and of the publisher, and the place of the printing and publication thereof; and a copy of every such book or printed paper shall be immediately forwarded to the magistrate or to such other person as the Government or other persons granting the license may direct ; and every person who shall print or publish any book or paper otherwise than in conformity with this provision, or who shall neglect to forward a copy of such book or paper in manner hereinbefore directed, unless specially exempted therefrom by the Governor- General in Council, or other person granting the license, shall be liable, on conviction before a magistrate, to a fine not exceeding one thousand rupees, and in default of payment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six calendar months.

VII. The Governor-General of India in Council, or the Executive Government of any Presidency, may, by order to be published in the Government Gazette, prohibit the publication or circulation, within the said territories, or the territories subject to the said Government, or within any particular part of the said territories, of any particular newspaper, book, or other printed paper, or any newspaper of any particular description, whether printed within the said territories or not ; and whoever, after

such prohibition, shall knowingly import, publish, or circulate, or cause to be imported, published, or circulated, any such book or paper, shall be liable for every such offence, on conviction before a magistrate, to a fine not exceeding five thousand rupees, or to imprisonment not exceeding two years, or to both; and every such book or paper shall be seized and forfeited.

VIII. The word "printing" shall include lithographing. The word "magistrate" shall include a person exercising the powers of a magistrate, and also a justice of the peace; and every person hereby made punishable by a justice of the peace may be punishable upon summary conviction.

IX. Nothing in this Act shall exempt any person from complying with the provisions of Act XI of 1845.

X. No person shall be prosecuted for any offence against the provisions of this Act within fourteen days after the passing of the Act, without an order of the Governor-General in Council or the Executive Government of the Presidency in which the offence shall be committed, or the person authorized under the provisions of this Act to grant licenses.

XI. This Act shall continue in force for one year.

W. MORGAN

Clerk of the Council

From the Calcutta Gazette Extraordinary, Saturday, 20th June, 1857

NOTIFICATION

Fort William, Home Department, 18th June, 1857

With reference to the provisions of Act No, XV of 1857, it is hereby notified that applications for licenses to keep or use any printing-press, or types, or other materials or articles for printing within the town of Calcutta, are to be made to the commissioner of police.

The Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal is authorized to grant licenses under the said Act, and to appoint any person or persons to receive applications for such licenses in any part of the Lower Provinces of the Presidency of Bengal except the town of Calcutta.

The Lieutenant-Governor of the North-western Provinces is authorized to grant licenses under the said Act, and to appoint any person or persons to receive such applications in any part of the North-western Provinces of the Presidency of Bengal.

The Governor of the Straits Settlements, the Chief Commissioners of the Punjaub and Oude, and the Commissioners of Mysore, Coorg, Nagpore, Pegu, and the Tenasserim and Martaban provinces, are authorized severally to appoint any person or persons to receive such applications within the provinces, districts, and settlements under their control.

The conditions upon which licenses to keep or use any printing-press, or types, or other materials or articles for printing, will ordinarily be granted, are as follows :

1. That no book, newspaper, pamphlet, or other work printed at such press, or with such materials or articles, shall contain any observations or statements impugning the motives or designs of the British Government, either in England or India, or in any way tending to bring the said Government into hatred or contempt, to excite disaffection or unlawful resistance to its orders, or to weaken its lawful authority, or the lawful authority of its civil or military servants.
2. That no such book, pamphlet, newspaper, or other work shall contain observations or statements having a tendency to create alarm or suspicion among the native population of any intended interference by Government with their religious opinions and observances.
3. That no such book, pamphlet, newspaper, or other work shall contain observations having a tendency to weaken the friendship towards the British Government of native princes, chiefs, or States in dependence upon or alliance with it.

The above conditions apply equally to original matter, and to matter copied from other publications.

A copy of every book, pamphlet, newspaper, or other work published in the town of Calcutta is to be immediately forwarded to the commissioner of police.

By order of the Right Hon. the Governor-General in Council.

CECIL BEADON

Secretary to the Government of India

APPENDIX C

Licensing of Arms in Calcutta

HCPP, Papers related to the Mutinies in East Indies Appendix (B) Further papers (No: 7) In continuation of No: 5) Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, 1857.

Enclosure 54 in Number 8

Excerpts from the Letter written by the Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of India, Fort William, November 7, 1857

Sir,

I am directed to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, dated 21st ultimo, calling for the immediate submission of the return of arms, &c., sold in Calcutta and other places subordinate to this Government, required by your letter of the 25th July last.

In compliance with the request for an explanation of the cause of delay in the submission of this statement now transmitted, I am directed to state that, on receipt of your letter, the officers named on the margin* were written to, to supply the requisite information, but it was not until the 2nd instant, and after his attention had been again called to the subject, that the Commissioner of Police in Calcutta sent in his reply, in which the following reasons were given, for his apparently tardy compliance with the requisition addressed to him.

“This statement, which I now beg to forward, the returns for which I have done my utmost to procure correctly, I have hitherto hesitated to submit, because it does not, I am afraid, approximate even the actual number of arms sold. The difficulties I have had to encounter in procuring these returns have been great. With regard to imported arms, after procuring from the Customs-House the names of importers, I found that they had, in many cases, sold portions of an importation to various dealers, by whom they had again been sub-divided, and so on, till it was impossible to discover to whom the arms imported had been sold for actual use. The small native dealers, I found, kept no records at all, and their accounts were of such a strange description that I could make nothing out of them. I have, therefore, been obliged to take for granted the statements of the various dealers in arms from which to frame the accompanying statement, which must consequently be most incorrect.”

I have, &c.,

A.R. Young

Secretary to the Government of Bengal

TABLE 5

Enclosure 55 in Number 8
Statement of Arms Sold During the Months of May, June and July 1857
IN CALCUTTA

DESCRIPTION OF ARMS									REMARKS
Muskets	A.380	B.194	574	..	..	..	..	..	A. - Of these 210 were "returned stores from the Crimea
Matchlocks	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Rifles	76	..	76	..	..	..	..	..
Fowling Pieces	176	..	176	..	..	..	..	..	B. and C. - These, for the most part, are made from condemned barrels or locks, sold from the arsenal of Fort William
Pistols	476	C.317	793	..	F.	..	G.	..	D. - Of these 42 are "returned stores from the Crimea"
Swords	D.168	179	349	..	..	..	..	..	E. - These were sold my Mackenzie, Lyall, and Co., to a native dealer, who paid for them, but has not removed them, having no sale for them; 800 others were found in the hands of another native dealer, who purchased them from the Arsenal, and these have been sent into Fort William.
Pikes, & c.	E.800	29	829	..	..	..	..	..	F. and G. - This information cannot be furnished. The European dealers say that a very small proportion was sold to the natives.

A.R. Young
Secretary to the Government of Bengal

APPENDIX D

Excerpts from the Diary of Dr. Brennand, Principal of the Dhaka College

Leaves from a Diary in Lower Bengal by C.S., London 1896

Oriental and India Office Collection

Catalogue Number: 10057 ee.10

Appendix B

The Mutiny at Dacca

The mutinies began at Barrackpore in March, 1857, by the 34th Native Infantry. Three officers were wounded. The 19th at Berhampore then showed signs of disaffection; they were ordered to Barrackpore, and both regiments were disbanded. In May news arrived of the outbreak at Meerut. At this time, the sepoy stationed at Dacca consisted of two companies of the 73rd Native Infantry. In this month, the missionaries met with some opposition from the sepoy whilst preaching in the bazaar. At the end of May or beginning of June, two of the companies of the 73rd arrived from Julpigoree as a relief for those that had been in Dacca for some time.

10th June: The troops appear excited on account of the rumour that European troops are to be sent to Dacca.

12th June: A panic spread among the Europeans in consequence of a report to the effect that the two companies of the 73rd which had left the station about the beginning of the month had met with some disbanded men from Barrackpore, and had mutinied; that they had returned to Dacca and had been joined by the men at Lal Bagh; that they were looting the bazaar, and setting free the prisoners at the Jail. A number of Europeans assembled at the house of Mr. Jenkins the Magistrate³⁰; others resolved to defend themselves at the Bank. Some of the ladies went on board boats on the river; arms were collected; the whole town was in a state of excitement; the bund was crowded with natives in a state of wonder and curiosity. Lieutenants McMohan and Rhynd, the Officers in command of the troops, started for the Lal Bagh, where the sepoy were located. On their return they reported that their men were all quiet and in their quarters; that the alarm was groundless. On the evening drive, the natives who were collected in knots along the road seemed surprised to see us, after the report that we had all fled and left them to their fate.

13th June: Everything quiet again, and we are going on with our works as usual.

Between the 19th and 23rd June, the Government set up a hundred men of the Indian Navy under Lieutenant Lewis, for the protection of the town. They were located in the house on the opposite side of the road to the Baptist Chapel.

³⁰ On the day of the first panic, Jenkins was Magistrate, and Carnac Collector. Subsequently Carnac was appointed Magistrate and Collector. At this time, Davidson was Commissioner, Abercrombie the Judge, Pearson Additional Judge, and Bainbridge Assistant Magistrate.

28th June: Two deserters were caught in the neighbourhood by the Police, but were rescued by some of the Sepoys. The two Companies were paraded, but the Burkundazes (Constables) either could not point out the men who had assisted the rescue, or were afraid to do so. The Sepoys complained that they could not go about the town without being interfered with by the Police.

5th July: The Metcalfes³¹ came in from Comillah in a fright; they had heard that the sepoy at Chittagong had mutinied, and that they were on their way to Dacca. The report was however without foundation.

Dacca has been comparatively quiet since the arrival of the sailors. Lieutenant Lewis has his tars out frequently in the morning, to practice with the guns in the space near the racquet Court, and in front of the College. He wheels his men about in all directions; sometimes he storms the Collectorate – first at one gate, then at the other, going through all the maneuvers for loading and firing. The sepoy on guard³² are very angry; they say: “*Yih kya dar dekhlati?*” (“What is all this threatening?”) They do not seem to have much affection for the sailors. To-day there was something of a panic among the sepoy. Dowell, who is in command of the station sent up to the *lal Bagh* for the screws used in elevating the guns, and the men there supposed that there was some intention of disarming them.

30th July: A meeting of Europeans and East Indian inhabitants capable of bearing arms was held at the college; nearly sixty people present. It was resolved to form two corps of volunteers, one of infantry and the other of cavalry; Major Smith to command the infantry, and Lieutenant Hitchins the cavalry.

1st, 2nd and 3rd August, the three days of Buckree Eed³³: The Volunteers all on the alert, patrols out all night on each of the three days. Apprehensions that the Mahomedans may cause some disturbance. The 2nd, being Sunday, a party of volunteers stationed at the college to protect the people who were at Church. Great alarm amongst the European and Armenian residents, especially among those with families. The terrible news from the North-West proves the necessity of being prepared for any sudden outbreak.

11th August: many of the Armenians are leaving for Calcutta. The Europeans are thinking of fortifying the Mills. The volunteers are on parade for several hours daily, and are making good progress in drill. File-Firing tomorrow, and target practice shortly. The natives scarcely understand the commotion among the Sahibs, or the object of the *volunteer ka pultun* (regiment), who have been keeping up nightly patrols.

³¹ Mr. Metcalfe was Judge or Collector of the Tippera District.

³² Men of the treasury Guard at the Collectorate.

³³ A Mahomedan festival, following the fast of Ramzan, which lasts for a month, during which no food is taken till after the sundown. The Id closes the fast on the appearance of the New Moon, and is celebrated as a period of Pious rejoicing and relief from fasting. This is succeeded by the Bakri Id, so called from the animal sacrifices, chiefly of goats (bakri), that are offered at this festival.

14th and 15th August: The festival of *Jummo Ostomee*³⁴. There was as usual a large crowd of people. The cavalry volunteers were mounted on elephants, and well armed and ready for anything that might occur. The infantry were also armed, and at the College, but all passed off quietly. Letters from Julpigoree, the Head-Quarters of the 73rd. The officers say they have no hope of being able to keep their men from following the example of the rest of the Bengal Army. They have sent away two of the ensigns to Darjeeling; but that if their men should rise, they have no expectation of being able to escape, as the country is completely inundated; and they have no *pucka* house in which they could take refuge to defend themselves.

It has been decided that if the men at Julpigoree do mutiny, the sepoy here shall be at once disarmed. There are about fifteen men at the Collectorate; and the plan will be to disarm these in the first instance, and afterwards to proceed to the Lal Bagh to disarm the men there, and to bring away the guns now in their charge.

22nd August: The fortification of the Mills is going on; and it will not be long before the place will be ready. There are 200 men at work, digging a ditch from the nullah round the house to the river.

27th August: The fortifications are progressing; and it is supposed that should there be occasion for it, we should be able to make a stand against five or six thousand men. The country around is however quiet, but there are many rumours of armed men having been seen at different places coming down the river in boats. We are informed by the Magistrate that we are to have two companies of Europeans at Dacca, and one troop of Horse Artillery, within a month.

30th August: Yesterday, Sunday, was the great day of the Mohurram³⁵. The Cavalry volunteers were out all the night patrolling; they describe the town as unusually quiet. The people did not assemble in the same numbers as in former years. Only about fifty were present at the *Hosseinee Dalan*. It is believed that the Musulmans are completely cowed.

14th September: Some alarm here in consequence of a report that the sepoy in Assam are in a state of great excitement, and that they have become very insolent. The Government has sent off a number of sailors in the *Horungatta* by way of the Sunderbuns; they are expected to arrive here tomorrow, and are intended for Assam.

³⁴ A Hindoo festival, celebrating the eight incarnation of Lord Krishna.

³⁵ The most important of all religious observances among the Musulmans, commemorating the Holy War waged against the infidels by Hassan and Hussen, and their untimely death. Under the old Nawabs of Dacca, the ceremonies of the mohurram were performed with great solemnity at the Husseni Dalan, and the festival is still observed there, but on a reduced scale of grandeur. The place of worship called Husseni Dalan, is situated in the heart of the city near the Jail, and is said to have been built by Mir Morad, Darogah of the Nawara mehals, who had charge of the public buildings in the time of Sultan Muhammad Azim.

The Nawara Mehals were tracts of country the revenue of which was set apart for maintenance the Fleet under the Mogul Government.

During the Mohurram outbreaks of fanatical violence, and affrays, especially between Hindoos and Mahomedans, are not uncommon.

The 73rd at Julpigoree still quiet. We have hopes that it will prove staunch. Should it not, we shall be involved here; but we shall be quite a match for the sepoy, and they would probably take to flight. They have been much more respectful towards us of late.

27th September: Everything quiet. The apprehensions regarding the spread of the insurrection to Bengal are in some measure allayed.

4th October: Today has been fixed upon by the Bishop as a day of humiliation. Winchester away at Sylhet. The service was read by Abercrombie, and the sermon by Pearson. In Dacca we are all quiet. The Rajah of Assam was brought in a prisoner the day before yesterday.

12th October: The Cavalry Volunteers gave a ball to the infantry. The gathering not so great as expected; about ten ladies present. Of the infantry volunteers only about twenty attended in uniform. The party was, on the whole, a very pleasant one.

19th October: Some of the Sepoys here have been recently punished, but the matter has been kept quiet.

1st November: Something like a panic occurred on Sunday last, caused by the removal of the sailors to the house near the Church recently occupied by the Nuns. The sepoy got ammunition out of the magazine, and it was thought that an outbreak was imminent. It is reported that they have written to their brethren at Julpigoree, asking whether they should resist if an attempt were made to disarm them. We believe that the disarming could be effected with little danger to ourselves; but it is feared that the effects on the troops at Chittagong, Sylhet and Julpigoree might be disastrous. It is supposed that if we can preserve order in Dacca, the other places will remain quiet. The men are very civil, but with the example of their *bhai buns* (brethren) before us, we cannot put much trust in them.

9th November: The infantry volunteers gave a dinner to the station. It came off in the large hall of my house. It was one of the largest parties of gentlemen that have ever been in Dacca. About seventy were invited, and upwards of fifty sat down to dinner. People thought that my house would not be large enough for the occasion, but everything was very conveniently arranged.

17th November: Everything continues quiet around us, and the news from the North-West is more cheering.

26th November: The storm that has been passing over India has just passed over Dacca, happily without any of the disastrous effects that have attended it in its course elsewhere. We are now rid of our 'staunch' and 'loyal' friends – the sepoy. Up to Saturday last we were going on just as usual. There was a party out at cricket in the afternoon, and the volunteers were at their usual exercise with ball-cartridge. In the evening we had our usual drive on the course. The dawk, however, brought bad news from Chittagong; and an express was received with intelligence that the remnant of the 34th, the regiment disbanded at Barrackpore at the beginning of the mutiny, had broken out; that they had looted the Treasury, taking with them about Three Lakhs of Rupees (Rs 300000); and that they had also killed several Europeans. It is now believed that the Europeans escaped. At about 6 O'clock in the evening it was determined that the sepoy here, the detachment of the 73rd, should be disarmed: their number, including the artillery men under the command of Dowell, was 260. They

had possession of two field pieces; and in their lines they held a remarkably strong position. It is reported that they threatened to resist any attempt at disarming them, and they affected to despise our sailors, who are generally of small stature. The sailors were about ninety in number, fit for duty. It was therefore necessary that they should use great precautions in dealing with a body of armed men nearly three times their number.

The Volunteers were warned to be ready at 5 o'clock the following morning, Sunday, the 22nd, and they were enjoined to assemble quietly, so as to excite no suspicion. At the time appointed, there were assembled the Commissioner, the Judges and some other civilians, and from twenty to thirty volunteers. It was still dark, and we waited a short time for the signal. The plan was, to begin by disarming the Treasury Guard, to place the disarmed men in charge of the Volunteers; the sailors would then proceed their whole force to the Lal Bagh; and it was hoped that the men there would have given up their arms without opposition. Everything appeared to go on well: the guards at the Treasury were disarmed before the signal was given for the Volunteers to advance. There were about fifteen of the sepoys standing or sitting outside of their quarters; and the rest of them, making altogether about thirty-six, were supposed to be inside the building. They appeared to be very much dejected, and they reproached their officers for subjecting them to such disgrace, protesting that they would have given up their arms at once to their own officers had they only been asked to do so.

In the meantime the sailors, on reaching the Lal bagh, found the sepoys drawn out, prepared to make a resistance; they had evidently been apprised of our intention to disarm them. The sentry fired his musket and killed one of our men; his example was followed by the others, and a volley was fired on the sailors as they advanced through the broken wall near the southern gateway. The guns had been placed in position in front of BeeBee Peri's tomb, so as to command the entrance, and they opened fire upon our men with grape. As soon as the sailors had got well into the place, they fired a volley. Lieutenant Lewis then led them up the ramparts to the left, charging the sepoys, and driving them before them at the point of the bayonet. The sepoys took shelter in their quarters, but they were driven on from building to building by the sailors. At this time, Mr. Mayo³⁶, a midshipman, at the head of eight men who were under his command, made a gallant charge from the ramparts down upon the sepoy guns; they were soon taken and spiked, and the sepoys began flying in every direction. There was a severe struggle at the end of the rampart: many of the sepoys were driven over the parapet. Mr. Bainbridge had also a fall over the rampart as he stepped back to avoid the thrust of one of the sepoys. The sailors obtained a complete victory: the sepoys fled and concealed themselves in the jungle, leaving about forty of their number killed. Many of those who escaped were severely wounded. Our loss was one killed on the field, four severely wounded, since dead, and nine or more or less severely wounded. Dr. Green, who accompanied the sailors, was wounded in the thigh. He was kneeling down at the time attending to one of the sailors, who had also been wounded. He is getting on well, but complains of numbness in the lower part of the leg.

A number of the fugitive sepoys have been brought in. Four of them have been already hung, and several others are to undergo the same punishment. On Monday

³⁶ Afterwards made V.C. for his dashing behaviour on this occasion.

everything was quiet again, and we are going on with our work as if nothing had happened. But many of the natives left the city through fear.

29th November: we have had great apprehensions during the week regarding the residents at Mymensingh and Sylhet. It has been ascertained that our fugitive sepoys were on their way towards those places. It is fortunate however that they are not all proceeding altogether. The largest party only took the Toke road towards Mymensingh: about twenty of their armed men were in front; then followed some of the disarmed men, and only one woman with her children: then the wounded, who appear to have been numerous, and lastly another body of about thirty armed men. As they approached Mymensingh, the Magistrate with a number of *Burkundazes* (policemen) took the field to oppose their passing through the station. They declined the fight, and took the direction to Jumalpoore.

The Chittagong mutineers were on their way to Dacca, and it was supposed that their object was to join the men of the 73rd. It was then reported that they were about to cross the Tipperah Hills to join the men stationed at Sylhet. It is now currently reported that they are at a place on the other side of Comillah: that they have sent a message to the Rajah of Tipperah, that if he does not join them they will dethrone him. The European inhabitants of Comillah, and the respectable native inhabitants, have all got away.

30th November: Three of Lal Bagh's mutineers were hung this morning: these, with eight others, that have already undergone the same punishment, make eleven in all. We consider that such examples are absolutely necessary in these times. They have produced an excellent effect upon the people, and the bad characters of the town thoroughly understand the lesson that has been read to them. I do not remember the time when the natives were so civil in their behaviour as they are now.

3rd December: Two steamers and a flat arrived this morning with 300 of the 54th Queen's Regiment and 100 sailors on board. The soldiers start for the Tipperah District as soon as a sufficient stock of provisions can be collected. It is supposed that they will be in time to intercept the men from Chittagong before they can reach Sylhet. The sailors will proceed to Bulwah on their way to Rungpore. It is to be hoped they are not too late. The Sylhet dawk is stopped. It is supposed that the Chittagong mutineers are somewhere on the Sylhet road.

9th December: The latest report from Sylhet states that the Chittagong mutineers had not reached that station; that they were somewhere in the territories of the rajah of Tipperah; and that they are afraid to venture upon the plains for fear of the *gora log* (white people). Their party in all consisted of 500, including their women and children, and the prisoners they had set free from the gaol at Chittagong. They were in great want of provisions, and were stockading themselves, expecting an attack to be made upon them.

18th December: No tidings for the last few days from Sylhet. The last news received was to the effect that the people there were prepared to give the mutineers a warm reception if they should venture upon attacking them. We hope to hear shortly from the troops which left us so lately. The Dacca mutineers were supposed to be somewhere in Bhutan.

14th January, 1858: The station is now somewhat gay. The steamers with the European troops have returned. The Chittagong mutineers had kept to close to the

jungle on their way to Sylhet. The Sylhet Light Infantry came up with them on two occasions, and each time they have beaten them. The soldiers and sailors are strolling about the streets in great numbers. There is some uncertainty if they are to remain at Dacca. The general impression is that they are not required here, and that they might be usefully employed elsewhere.

24th January: the European troops have left for Calcutta. Although everything is quiet on this side of the country at the moment, the sailors will probably remain for several months longer.

The principal topic now in India is the transfer of the Government to the Crown, and the probable changes that may take place in the different services, and in the general interests of the country. – *History of Dacca*.

Table 8

List of Killed and Wounded During the Rebellion at Lal Bagh in Dhaka

Enclosure 87 in Number 4

Names.	Ship.	Rating.	
Henry Smith	Punjaub	A.B.	Mortally; since dead
Doctor green, Civil Surgeon	..	..	Severely
James Munro	Zenobia	A.B.	Dangerously
Neil Mc Mullen	Punjaub	A.B.	„
William Hesden	„	A.B.	„
Alexander Mc Miller	„	A.B.	„
Charles Gardiner	Zenobia	A.B.	„
James Hughes	„	Art. G.	Severely
George Adams	„	A.B.	„
William Alfred	„	A.B.	„
Thomas Kean	„	Art. G.	„
George List	Punjaub	A.B.	„
Robert Brown	Zenobia	Art. G.	„
Samuel Hughes	„	Bombay Artillery	„
Lieutenant T.E. Lewis	„	„	Slightly
Patrick O'Brien	Zenobia	A.B.	„
John Jones	Punjaub	C.F.C.	„
Lieutenant Dowell	Bengal Artillery		„

Dacca, November 22, 1857

W.M. Thomson, Superintendent Surgeon, in temporary Medical Charge

T.E. Lewis, Lieutenant Indian Navy

APPENDIX E

Judicial Department Proceedings Government of Bengal

17 December 1857

WBSA

Proceeding Number: 246 Number: 5

From Munniram Dewan

To Muddoo Mullick, Dated: 23rd Srabon

The other day I wrote a letter containing what (Peali had) said. If any of the things are ready, send them quickly. If not, there is no occasion to write. From my house also, what money and things you can get, send down. At this present (moment), there is great *goolmaal* in the *Rajdhani* (Capital). Day and night the Council open and are perplexed from the anguish at the battle...the will of the Deity, it is impossible to divine...We always pray for the welfare of the *Rajah* ... if it be the will of the Deity, all will be accomplished.

True Translation

Signed: C. Holroyd

Proceeding Number. 246 Number: 6

From Munniram Dewan

To Krishnokant Adhkar Gosamee, Dated 23rd Srabon

(This letter was intercepted)

None can fathom the will of the Deity. A needle can pierce through a mountain (if it be the will of the Deity). How can I describe or define the perplexity of thoughts in which I have fallen. Alive today, defunct tomorrow. Such is the existing state of things. The whole body being dead, the light (i.e. life) exist in the lower extremities (i. e. feet). You will understand that such at present is the condition of the people of England. All like Biswo, Dron, & Corno are dead. As they go, so they depart (for

good) they never return. Having both seen and heard of the ill condition of the Europeans I am of opinion that the workshop (“bela”) of the Deity is wonderful. I am oppressed with grief at the sight of all this. There will never be a Rajah in future (in whose reign) there is no fear nor apprehension of thieves & Dacoits in the highway where you please there go, as you feel disposed. But I guess the Deity will put a limit to this. Whatever is written by the Deity that will come to pass. You will not divulge to any body the Rajah’s orders (i. e. the orders of the present Rajah or British Govt.) are very stringent.

Enemies stand around on 8(sic) Sides, (i. e. all sides). Their Pride (perhaps insolence) is daily increasing. The Rajahs (i. e. Europeans) have become very thoughtful. What may happen in future, none can tell.

Translation. Sanscrit Letter written throughout in a feigned hand and signed in cipher

On the cover- Sree Jooth Oorbudhur Seeksuguree Boorwar Neecota poucha. Assam Seeksagur

Content of Letter- The strength of the enemy is daily increasing. All the forces in the beginning^A (^A throughout the length & breadth of the land) middle^A and end^A have become enemies (have mutinied). At present they have come to the side or edge (Bengal) and having come to the side or edge have taken it and the great ones (referring to the Europeans) are greatly troubled, and the (*the Europeans) battles* they fight are unprofitable (to them the great ones). In the day all are full of thoughts & doubts. At nights they have no sleep. Wherever there have been battles, there great numbers of Europeans have been slain. As death (personified) takes away the lives of (rebels*) people, so (that is in the same proportion) have the enemy* become strong (to take away lives). The warriors in the west have become so strong that to state what will be the result, is impossible. What I do know at the present is, that in the writ (sic), wherever there have been fight there the great ones have been killed. Those who go forth to Battle (referring to Europeans) enter the house of death from which they never can return. This is most surprising! There have been killed 6000 like Bisno Dron & Corno, and their commanders, Colonels have been killed beyond calculation. The rage of the Mussalmans is so great that their purpose is fixed without a chance of wavering. In the future what will be the will of the Deity, the Deity alone knows. Dated 14th August 1857

You will never never never divulge all I have written. In the 5th line of the alphabet you will take the 5th letter first and the 5th letter last. Between it and the Shoodaboras(sic) in the 4th line, you will put an eikar. After this you will take the 2nd letter in the 6th line together with an akar.

My Lord, I am ignorant. You will pardon my faults my Lord. The great Brahmins who make “toposhea” always pardon. End.

Translation- Letter and cover written in a feigned hand.

(Unsigned)

Address on outer cover

This letter was intercepted

To Sree Moheedhur Surma Matool Mooktear Mohoshoi

Assam Joorhath- Bearing

Address on Inner Cover This Letter you will deliver within

Contents of Letter Sree Sree Jooth Mohemaboro prochundo protapashoo Shoobasir bada neebadon Medong- Your father's father having furnished me with the expenses sent me to Nuddea to prosecute my studies. Having studied there 7 years, likewise at Benares and Drabee (sic) having studied the Nai Ved 12 or 13 years I have this month of Maugh reached Calcutta and our residing at Kalighat. But I am afflicted with the news of the loss of your Kingdom and your property, so much so, that I am unable to return to my country. But you may assure yourself that your troubles will now come to an end. That speedily your good fortune will appear. The time has arrived. But though good fortune may be in a man's fate, he must nevertheless prove his manhood as it is likewise necessary for the hand to convey cooked rice to the mouth, to satisfy the cravings of the stomach. Opportunities do not always occur. Just as if a man neglecting to sow his "cuttia" in Jut & Assar when there is rain, remains in poverty always. Therefore understand well what follows, and determine with energy & intellect to act. As it is a fact that I was born in a Brahmin's House, so without doubt what I have stated will come to pass. In like manner many others have attained their wishes.

Convey the intelligence of my good health to my Dada Poorooshottum Shormah at Joneekakar.

1st Droba(sic) The Big House under which you are, is very very old. The Posts, the Beams, the fastenings are all broken and the house is leaky, a little wind will blow it down. At this present to ^A No Troops rethatch & repair it, it being the rains, there is neither bet nor grass.^A For this reason it is broken away on all sides & rotten. The mere house is supported by props and inerpert (sic) watching day and night. For it to be saved during the remaining days of the Bursat will be very difficult. And if this house is destroyed, and the new house being erected should be finished, in that event it will be well for you. I have fully ascertained this from a clever astrologer (Joteesh) and therefore write this to you. You are acquainted with the Borbora (architect i.e. king of Delhi) Because the old foundation was in the name of your forefathers. The new foundation will be in your name, and the benefit from changing the foundation I have both seen and heard; and the house being changed I learn from history that many Rajahs and nobles *Rebellion

Derive benefit. At this present the growl of the Tiger* is everywhere heard. As many as 13 or 15 (thousands) Europeans have been destroyed. There is no account of the number. To the west all the gardens are destroyed and all of them together with their wives *Sepoys and children have been all destroyed beyond calculation by the Tigers* rampart. The few that do escape, the mad dogs (Budmashes) devour by the way. The old hunters (Generals) are extinct. If news has been sent for new hunters to come, still the Tigers are so numerous how many can the hunters kill? The Tigers have become so powerful by the will of the Deity, that the few old Hunters that remain, seeing this quake with fear and are quarrelling and disagreeing amongst themselves. To escape the present calamity many say will be difficult. And the place where you reside, the owners (Europeans) are in great fear & hold their lives in their

hands. When they may decamp, there is no knowing. At the moment this occurs, you having kept your ears open, must stand up, and the forces there you must bring over to your side. By means of gold and persuasion, by any and every means in your power you must get them over to your side, agree to augment their pay for the future without doubt. Good must follow.

Dated the 26th Assar

(Sd.) I. Holroyd

P. A. Commissioner

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